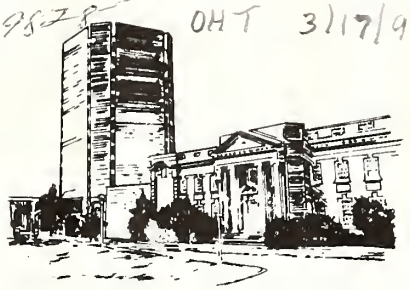
RECENT TENNESSEE POLITICAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWS WITH HENDERSON HILLIN

BY CHARLES W. CRAWFORD

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY



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NOVEMBER 2, 1988

FEBRUARY 4, 1989

BY CHARLES W. CRAWFORD

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Release date: Effective 2/25/92

PLACE Henderson Hilton

DATE 2/25/90

Nashville TN

(~~Interviewee~~) Place

Charles W. Crawford

(For the Mississippi Valley Archives
Of the John Willard Brister Library
of Memphis State University)

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NAME _____

DATE _____

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(Interviewee)

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(For the Mississippi Valley Archives
of the John Hazen Wilkins Library
of Illinois State University)

(OHRO Form 6)

THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THE PROJECT IS RECENT TENNESSEE POLITICAL HISTORY. THE DATE IS NOVEMBER 2, 1988. THE PLACE IS NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MR. HENDERSON HILLIN. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE. TRANSCRIBED BY BETTY WILLIAMS. INTERVIEW I.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Hillin, would you give us a little background information about when you were born and who your family was and we will start from there where you grew up and your getting started to school.

MR. HILLIN: I was born October 4, 1930, in a community near Nashville,about thirteen miles from Nashville, that is a farm community called Neely's Bend.

DR. CRAWFORD: Stanley Horn, I believe, also was from Neely's Bend.

MR. HILLIN: Yes, and Stanley Horn was my third cousin. Mr. Horn and I stem from--he stems from David Sutton Graves, and I stem from David's brother, William Henry Graves--both of whom owned the property that is now Opryland. Anyway, I was born on a little farm down there in 1930 and I was the fifth child of Henderson Hillin Sr., my father, and my mother, Mary Katie Batey Hillin. Of course, I had four older sisters and then two years later I had a younger brother, Jim. I was born in the Depression and had the best rearing that I could have had because I didn't know any better. It was wonderful. We had a 225 acre

farm--plenty of animals to play with, reared in a farm community with farm values and farm ethics. It was just a wonderful thing. I really didn't know any better. [We were]educated at the Neely's Bend Elementary School, a three-room school. From there I went to high school at Isaac Litton High School in the Inglewood Community of Nashville. I graduated there in 1948.

Thereafter, I entered David Lipscomb College, now David Lipscomb University at Nashville, and was graduated from there with a degree in history in 1952. I taught school for a portion of the next year and then entered the United States Army in January 1953 and was assigned to army intelligence after basic training in which I worked as an Intelligence Agent for two years in Louisville, Kentucky.

During the time that I was in Louisville, Kentucky, I met agents of the FBI, working with them and Stumpy Talbott.

DR. CRAWFORD: His first name was Stumpy? (Laughter)

MR. HILLIN: Orval was his name. I think we called him Stumpy. He recruited me as an FBI agent. So I came back to Nashville after being separated from the army in January of 1955. Then on March 14 , 1955, I entered on duty as an FBI agent in Washington, D.C.

There I was sworn in as an FBI agent with ammunition to shoot and cars to ride in a country boy that just absolutely had the job of a lifetime, I thought. I thought that I was going to change the spectre of crime or the relationship of crime to America. I really thought I was going to accomplish something. The job never failed me. I went to work most every day thinking I had the best

job in the world. I loved it. I approached it with a zeal and a passion. I got to know J. Edgar Hoover very well during my time after serving in Los Angeles for two years and then back in Washington, D.C., where I worked Soviet intelligence cases.

I went to see Mr. Hoover because of my mother's health and he sent me directly to Nashville. I detail that story in the book.

DR. CRAWFORD: What year was that?

MR. HILLIN: That was 1961. I went to see Mr. Hoover. I went through a long thing in the book about my meeting with Mr. Hoover and how he was very concerned about my mother's health. He talked about his mother with whom he was very close. He told me to check the administrative list of office preference and I told him that I would, but knowing that that wouldn't be done. Five days later I received a letter from him saying, "Your headquarters have been transferred to Nashville, Tennessee." I thought I had struck gold!

DR. CRAWFORD: What kind of person was he individually?

Much has been written, much has been said. He was one of those publicized people in American history in recent times. What did you think of him as a person?

MR. HILLIN: Mr. Hoover was not as good as his supporters say he was, nor was he as bad as his detractors say he was. He was the right man at the right time for the job of Director for the FBI. The country was being overrun with kidnappers, and bank robbers and Mr. Hoover came in the FBI as a young man of twenty-eight. He modernized and began the Identification Division to handle fingerprints of criminals all

over the country. He standardized the hiring of personnel and insisted on good personnel. He paid a wonderful salary for government work, I thought.

Personally, I liked him a great deal. I have been a great Hoover man all my life. Although I have been able to see primarily that he stayed too long, Dr. Crawford.

DR. CRAWFORD: Or perhaps didn't change with the times enough.

MR. HILLIN: He refused to change with the times. When I was an agent, bless his heart, he didn't like colored shirts. That was just a hang-up of his. He grew up in a time when men wore stiff collars and that was the way that gentlemen dressed. They wore a white handkerchief in their lapel and hats and that was just the way. As an agent I bought my first hat in Washington, D.C.,the morning of March 14, 1955. They said, "How many of you have hats?" Not a person in the class had a hat. So we all went out at lunch and had to buy a gray fedora. That was just one of the things.

He insisted upon a certain style of dress and a certain style of handling things. He insisted upon a strict moral code. If you messed up on a case you were quick to be censured. He was also very quick to commend you if you did an outstanding job on a case. During my career, I received something like thirty or forty commendations (Don't hold me to this) on cases that I worked on, many of which came from J. Edgar Hoover.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you have any idea how many agents there were when you went into service in '55?

MR. HILLIN: When I went in,the agent force was right about

4,500. When I came out it went to 8,000. Then I went in at a salary of $5000 a year. I had been teaching school at $2200 a year.

DR. CRAWFORD: Good at the time.

MR. HILLIN: I doubled my salary or a little more than that. It was an excellent salary and good government benefits.

DR. CRAWFORD: J. Edgar Hoover had the remarkable ability to deal with Congress and to get appropriations to build the FBI into a world quality law enforcement organization which it could never have done I am sure without the money to support it.

When you arrived in Nashville, you were back in your own territory--your home state in 1961. I suppose this is mostly a matter of record, but what size was the FBI office here? What state did you find it in?

MR. HILLIN: When I came here Tennessee was divided into two districts for the FBI. This is a matter that should be recorded somewhere in history. Nobody has ever dealt with the history of the FBI the way it was handled.

The eastern judicial district of Tennessee was covered by the Knoxville office. We happened, in Nashville, to be in the middle judicial district and we were covered by the office in Memphis which meant that the agent in charge in Memphis covered Nashville and Memphis and then he covered the northern judicial district of Mississippi. At one time I think the FBI in Memphis covered the entire state of Mississippi and then New Orleans took over the lower half of Mississippi at some point in history. We

covered the northern portion of Mississippi and the two districts in Tennessee.

We had a man by the name of Ed Steele who was the agent in charge in Nashville. He was one of the finest and best FBI agents I ever worked for. He was an outstanding man. Right away when I got here, his assistant, Bill Sheets, was absolutely the most practical and best agent I ever knew in the FBI. They taught me more about crime and [how to] investigate crime than anyone I'd learned from in my career. They taught me how to see crime through the eyes of a criminal. I was a young man and it was so great to have this kind of tutelage on how to work cases.

Right away the first thing that I got when I got here,we had a huge vote fraud case which Richard Fulton was involved. He was the recipient of good luck in that case. He became the United States Representative from Nashville, as a result of one of the first big cases I worked here. When we got that done we had another big case--Jimmy Hoffa investigation that Sheets and Steele and I got to work a big part of although just as a young agent.

I went to Ole Miss in,I think, October of 1962 and worked undercover on the campus down there.

DR. CRAWFORD: You were young enough to be able to do that.

MR. HILLIN: I posed as a student on the campus and I saw guns being fired that night and I detailed that story pretty well in the book Tennpar. Those were exciting days for a young man in the FBI whose being paid this great salary and things were happening.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you were a part of them. I think your oppor-

tunity to learn under Steele and Sheets was a great advantage to you. The old mentor system in which a young person can learn personally from older people is something that is passing to a great degree now, but I think something is lost when it does for there is so much that you can't learn from the textbook and in the classes.

MR. HILLIN: You are so right. I guess I learned more from them and if I could give the current leadership of the FBI any advice, that would be it. Try to hold on to the older agents and let them take a younger agent, but don't let an older agent who is not fired up with the job or doesn't believe in the job, because that kind of person can ruin a young person's enthusiasm.

DR. CRAWFORD: You are talking about motivation, aren't you ?

MR. HILLIN: One of the criticisms of J. Edgar Hoover,and I'll have to be fair about it, I'll have to say that Mr. Hoover's strength was going to the Congress and being able to get x number of dollars appropriated for his agency. He did that by showing that this year he had 144,000 convictions of car cases. Many of those cases were small cases. They were cases that never should have been prosecuted in federal court. I don't know if it is appropriate on this tape, but I'd like to tell you the experience I had if you think so.

DR. CRAWFORD: Certainly, we need this record.

MR. HILLIN: Somebody needs to tell this kind of story in the FBI because it is a part of Tennessee history. As a young man I was assigned to handle the investigative

responsibilities at nearby Sewart Air Force Base, which was a viable United State installation at that time. And it was about fifteen or twenty miles out in the country from here. Each year under Mr. Hoover if you had one conviction a year under theft of government property next year you had to have two. If you had two the next year, two wouldn't be adequate. Three would be required.

DR. CRAWFORD: You had sort of a quota system.

MR. HILLIN: Nothing ever declined in the FBI. I don't mean this as a criticism of the FBI and don't intend it as such, but it was just the way things were.

Once, the Air Force found a young airman who had pilfered a pair of binoculars. In my judgment we should not have taken up the Federal Court's time with it. The man's story was that he was going to bring them back eventually and had them at home. They were old binoculars and not worth a great deal, anyway, I worked out an arrangement with the Air Force that he would be prosecuted by his commanding officer and receive summary judgment by his officer in charge. When I turned that report in and I got the United States attorney to decline in Nashville, when I turned that report in, the supervisor of that particular case in Memphis knew that his statistics were going to reflect that. He blew completely up. "You will go back to the United States attorney, and you will re-present this case. We need that statistic. That man will be prosecuted in Federal Court." I am not proud to say that I had to do what I had to do. I re-presented the case and then stood by and presented the facts of a young man who then

become a federal felon.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, it is bureaucracy with its appropriations and its statistics. I suppose it is too bad that sort of thing has to exist, but it is probably normal for an organization.

MR. HILLIN: Well, I sort of laid that background for you because in a few minutes I am going to tell you that that all had a purpose in the development of the FBI. Because the thing that actually brought Governor Blanton that we are going to talk about in a little while to his knees and changed Tennessee history was this very thing right here. I don't want to get ahead of the story, but we are going to see a change. I am going to detail to you a change in the FBI that came in under Clarence Kelley.

I guess this is as good a time as any to tell you that Mr. Hoover died in 1972. I had worked bank robbery cases in Nashville and I could continue my work in Nashville--just fugitives and bank robberies and racial matters and I came to know a lot of the black leaders and the black community in Nashville through those years. Nashville was on the cutting edge of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and '65 because of the demonstrations here. I had handled a great deal of that work. The FBI had come to where we were still continuing this thing of statistics and working cases that really local authorities could have handled better.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, the FBI had to be built up. The Director had to present statistics to Congress. I can see how it fit, but it might have led down some roads that might have been

less traveled and maybe kept some of your efforts and some of the other agents away from things that would have been better. Before we get to '72 can we talk a little about some of the things happening in this period, Hank?

MR. HILLIN: Sure.

DR. CRAWFORD: What about the bank robbery investigations? That was a major effort of the FBI then, wasn't it?

MR. HILLIN: Oh yes. After 1960, we had been through the Civil Rights movements really beginning with--I guess, the big push came in '63. No, it was probably a little earlier than that. Kennedy went in '61 and so right away there was a tremendous emphasis on civil rights and civil rights activities throughout the nation and particularly in the South.

Bobby Kennedy became Attorney General and after he became Attorney General he often came to Nashville. He came through here to check on the progress we were making on Jimmy Hoffa. He had a look about him that concerned me a little bit.

DR. CRAWFORD: How do you describe it? Was he a little fanatical?

MR. HILLIN: Yes, I guess that is the word I am looking for. Although he denied it a number of times he had a vendetta against Jimmy Hoffa. The man was absolutely obsessed with Jimmy Hoffa. The two were obsessed with each other. He saw him as an evil force in America and he wanted him taken down. The Government had suffered a tremendous defeat at Hoffa's hands in Washington in the district court up there in the celebrated case that Joe Louis testified in that I had worked on in Washington, D.C. I had done the surveillance work in Washington.

So in Nashville we had at this time the most tremendous onslaught against the jury system that I have ever seen in my life and in my career.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did that happen?

MR. HILLIN: Jimmy Hoffa (this has been detailed in a book by Phil Sheridan called The Rise and Fall of Jimmy Hoffa). Sheridan was a Justice Department troubleshooter and a former FBI agent. (I think he was a former agent). Anyway, after this Hoffa case started in Nashville, it was a very simple misdemeanor case. The issue in that case was: Did Jimmy Hoffa and his wife have a sweetheart deal as owners? His wife was the owner of Fleet Transport Company. I think that was the name of the case in Nashville,Tennessee. Did Fleet Transport have a sweatheart deal with the Teamsters' Union that Jimmy Hoffa really ran? It was obvious that they did have this sort of an arrangement and that he had a basic conflict of interest because he was taking money through his wife out of the management and operation of a company and at the same time he was operating the union that was dealing with them.

DR. CRAWFORD: He was in on both sides.

MR. HILLIN: Oh yes, on both sides and it was an interesting case and Hoffa had lied about his involvement and what he had done. The government charged Hoffa with a violation of (this takes [some explanation]) I think it was the NLRV Act, the Labor Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959, but that's a long time ago.

We were doing the investigation. We finally brought the case

to trial. Just for a simple misdemeanor, Hoffa brought all of these hoodlum characters into Nashville to try to buy the jurors off that would hear the facts of that case.

DR. CRAWFORD: The jury had been selected?

MR. HILLIN: Well they selected the jury but after they had selected them there was a highway patrolman that we covered meet after meet on surveillance and things like that that he met with officials of the Teamsters and then there was other evidence that there was heavy jury tampering. The jury system had never met an onslaught like Hoffa brought to Nashville. As a young agent it was heady stuff, Charles. I was a young agent, thirty-two years old and hadn't been in but about six or seven years and I was working on Jimmy Hoffa and working with these old experienced agents like Steele and in my hometown. Naturally, I was enthused about this.

One of the funny things and this has never come out in anything. Mr. Hoover and Mr. Kennedy had this rivalry that went back and it is well documented. There is no need of me going into it, but Hoover didn't want Kennedy to ever get ahead of the FBI. In this test Fleet case I told you about, the day that the jury was to deliver its verdict, the word came from Washington that Hoover would know the verdict before Kennedy. (Laughter)

So I was selected and you know the way a jury comes in when they charge the jury. They actually freeze everything and when the jury comes back to report they seal the doors and everything. But to insure that we won--let me share something for history that has never come out. To insure that Mr. Hoover got notification that

he could call Bobby Kennedy and tell him that: "Mr. Kennedy, here are the results in Nashville, Tennessee,of the Hoffa case." I was inside and we had people who could peep in the window of the rear door although it was sealed and no one came in or out. If I gave this signal by patting the top of my head, then that meant a conviction. If I touched my left shoulder, that meant that he was not guilty. If I took my left hand and put it on my right shoulder and I may get this mixed up and if I do, it has been a long time ago,then it was a mistrial.

DR. CRAWFORD: They had them all covered and someone was watching.

MR. HILLIN: As soon as the verdicts were read . Of course, there are a lot of administrative things the judge had to say , that person--that FBI agent who was--watching me ran immediately to an open telephone to Washington.

DR. CRAWFORD: They were holding it open, I am sure.

MR. HILLIN: Exactly, he called Bobby Kennedy and said, "Mr. Kennedy, this is J. Edgar Hoover. I'd like to give you the results of the trial in Nashville and here are the results." (Laughter)

DR. CRAWFORD: And J. Edgar Hoover was first at that time.

MR. HILLIN: That was important for some reason! To me it was turf maybe or something.

DR. CRAWFORD: A minor gesture perhaps, but he was making a point with Robert Kennedy. I can understand. (Laughter)

MR. HILLIN: They had a tremendous rivalry. This should be documented somewhere anyway. I think it should go down in history. There was a group of agents who worked on the

trial of Jimmy Hoffa in Chattanooga that resulted from the jury tampering efforts in Nashville. When it was all over all the principals who had worked with [of course, the president died] Kennedy forces was purged.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they remove him from service or transfer him to Montana?

MR. HILLIN: It was Courtney Evans, a very competent man. He is still living. He'd be a source of a great deal of information about the FBI. If someone ever really wanted to write an accurate history of the FBI, not from the bias against Mr. Hoover and all the stories that you hear about J. Edgar Hoover or whatever, but if you really wanted to do a history of the FBI, Courtney would be someone that was the leader of the Kennedy wing who got along with the Kennedys and as soon as Jack died or was killed his wing sort of went out of favor. So he retired soon after that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Sort of like a palace revolution that didn't succeed but might have.

MR. HILLIN: That sounds critical of the FBI and I don't really mean it to be or critical of Mr. Hoover.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think it is an organizational setting in which this kind of thing can happen in any structured organization where you have a good deal of power. Naturally, there are people who develop into factions and hope to get ahead one way or the other. But of all the things that have been written about the FBI this probably is one that has not been.

MR. HILLIN: No, this has never [been discussed] that agents

don't talk about. You are hearing secrets. This thing about the pat on the top of the head and this thing about Mr. Hoover. This has never come out, Charles.

DR. CRAWFORD: There is a book in that sort of thing if it ever would be collected and would ever be written, Hank. That might be something at some point in the future, when other things you are doing are out of the way, that you could get back for it would have to be someone who has trust--the ability to approach the people who were involved because this would never have been written.

MR. HILLIN: Ha, Ha. Dr. Richard Gib Powers that I am in touch with sent me a copy of his book recently about Mr. Hoover. I don't know if you have seen it. It is a new book. It's called Life and Power or Power and Glory or something like that.

DR. CRAWFORD: I've read of it, but have not seen it.

MR. HILLIN: It's an excellent book. He really does a good job of documenting J. Edgar Hoover's life best that I have seen in a long time. But he has a bias against Mr. Hoover. I told him when I wrote him recently, I said, "You knew a different Hoover than the one I knew." I understand where you are coming from and your suggestions are well taken about someone doing something. I am not the person to do it.

DR. CRAWFORD: It is so hard to be objective about some things. J. Edgar Hoover is one and the Kennedys are another. Some people have so much charisma, I suppose it is, or power that they polarize people around them in opposing groups. They are either admirers or they are enemies.

MR. HILLIN: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: And I think with Mr. Hoover it would be hard to take an objective historical approach where you see both sides.

MR. HILLIN: Dr.Powers is Professor of History at Long Island University on Staten Island and he does a good job. That is an area that really probably needs to be explored a little bit. Part of the Hoffa thing that has never come out, in other words, a big part of the investigation was a section that I handled called the Allen from the Banner case. It involved three police officers that Hoffa hired to come to Nashville to develop information about prospective jurors that would be seated in the box the next day.

Of course, they had a copy of the jury panel and these prospective jurors started getting telephone calls from someone who purported to be Allen from the Banner. At one time there was a very prominent writer for the Banner named Edgar Allen who was a sports writer.

DR. CRAWFORD: But he was not doing that.

MR. HILLIN: Oh no, it was all a pretext to get information about the beliefs and prejudices and non-prejudices of the prospective jurors. So anyway, the judge was infuriated when several of the propective jurors reported it the next day when the trial opened in Nashville. And he instructed the FBI to commence immediately to conduct an investigation of the Allen from the Banner Case. Well, I did the investigation and it was a long and arduous investigation. A very fine agent by the name of

Charlie Honetor, who will never go down in history in any other place and I'd like to put his name in history right here.

DR. CRAWFORD: H-O-N-I-T-O-R?

MR. HILLIN: H-O-N-E-T-O-R . Charlie Honetor, a very quiet unasuming man--very detailed accountant--and I worked together on that case. I had the case but he was assisting me on it. I knew that they had to stay somewhere--the people who came in here and did that. So we pulled all the records of the Andrew Jackson Hotel that we could get--subpoenaed all their records--the Hermitage Hotel and all the major hotels operating in Nashville at the time. We started going through the folios of telephone calls that were charged to the various rooms. We came up with these three names from West Virginia that had made a number of calls. We started checking the numbers and there they were--prospective jurors--local calls, but their numbers were recorded. There they were. Some of them were long distance calls because the middle district of Tennessee includes counties outside Nashville. So it was obvious that we had solved the Allen from the Banner Case.

Anyway, we zeroed in on these men, interviewed them at length and subsequently tried them after a number of delays. They were subsequently found not guilty, but they were identified. It was later on that Charlie Shafer, Assistant Attorney General tried the case in Columbia, Tennessee, before Judge Gray and they were found not guilty, but they were identified and as a result of that case the then Banner publisher, James Stahlman who is well-known in this area and you know who he was, had offered a $5,000 reward for anyone who identified themselves as Allen from the Banner. He

was infuriated that his paper he had worked for and was the epitome of character and integrity would be identified with something wrong. He offered this reward and the FBI could not accept the reward so the money was donated to the Boy Scouts of America at Camp Stahlman--a Boy Scout Camp near Nashville where the J. Edgar Hoover Rifle Range now exists.

It was another little sidelight.

DR. CRAWFORD: An interesting part of history and the kind of thing that you don't get in writing unless it is collected in this way. Were there other attempts to influence the jury?

MR. HILLIN: You could go on and on about the Hoffa case. There were numerous attempts. The grand jury heard testimony and there were just volumes of interviews and transcripts of people testifying at the trial. Yes, there were numerous attempts to influence that jury. It was a horrible onslaught.

But I was glad to be a part of all that. Then after that case, I moved on to bank robberies and there started here an unemployed Ford Motor worker by the name of Gary Ethridge who formed a bank robbery gang here called the Ethridge Gang. Every Monday and every Friday they hit a bank in Nashville using a stolen white Pontiac as a getaway car.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was an awfully consistent M.O., wasn't it?

MR. HILLIN: Yes, the first robbery occurred in April 1967, when 28,000 was stolen from Commerce Union Bank in

Bordeaux, a little community here in Nashville. It continued throughout the summer. Of course, that case was assigned to me [and] there again it was a long and involved case. One of these days I have said if I write my autobiography that I will detail that case, but it was a long and involved case which came to fruition in a six-week trial which began in November 1967 and resulted in two gang members murdered to keep them from talking. It was written up in Popular Detective. It was a wonderful case for a young agent to get involved in, but six weeks of trial in federal court with the current judge on the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, Gil Merritt, that you'll see in my book, Born to Lose quoted in there. He was the prosecutor that worked hand in hand with me. He and a fellow named Al Knight [were] both excellent prosecutors. We brought all these people to justice. They received terms of up to 75 years apiece.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were there any special breaks that enabled you to solve that thing or was it just hard work?

MR. HILLIN: Just hard work and I turned a man by the name of Beard, who has subsequently been to Federal Prison. Then he went to State Prison. He has rehabilitated his life after a long prison term. He and I see each other occasionally. We are friends. In fact, we are going to have lunch together one of these days before too long. It is just an unusual situation. I have had the unusual aptitude--I don't know what it is--even though I have convicted a number of criminals or worked on their cases, there was never anything personal and I have maintained a relationship after and during the investigations. That is until I

met the criminals in TENNPAR.

DR. CRAWFORD: Eddie Sisk--a case in point.

MR. HILLIN: Yes, Eddie Sisk was a case in point. He took this thing so personally. He took it as a personal affront that we would investigate his administration and that of Governor Blanton and he and his group of criminals were the only ones that I ever really have had trouble with.

DR. CRAWFORD: Maybe they were less professional than some of the others.

MR. HILLIN: Maybe that is it. That could be, Charles.

DR. CRAWFORD: No. This is all related to what happened in Tennessee in the sixties.

MR. HILLIN: It had a definite influence on this thing. Mr. Hoover was a lawyer and he always felt like lawyers would make the best FBI agents. Then later he altered it to include accountants. Lawyers are not the best research people. They are trained to present evidence in court, but they are not trained to collect evidence. They are trained to present evidence.

DR. CRAWFORD: Someone else should collect the evidence for them.

MR. HILLIN: Yes. But history people are trained to research. If you teach Charles Crawford the elements of a crime and say I want you to go out and find if that crime has been committed and if it has been committed, find out who did it. I think the history major or the history professor would be in a comparable or better position than many lawyers.

DR. CRAWFORD: At least you do know research.

MR. HILLIN: Right, but that is just a sidelight that I have always felt. Through all of this J. Edgar Hoover was still in charge and he was running the FBI. We had gone through the "New Left Movement" of the sixties and I think we talked about it a little bit. The time had just run away with Mr.Hoover. The times left Mr. Hoover back in the forties and fifties. A great man who deserves his place in history, but he did not change with the years. The Congress voted him a full retirement if he would quit at age 70. He said he was not interested in quitting. He worked then the last years of his life for nothing. He could have had the same number of dollars if he had stayed home in the morning and tended to his flowers.

DR. CRAWFORD: But that was his life. That was more important to him I am sure than money and he did not want to give that up.

MR. HILLIN: He didn't want to give it up, fought to the bitter end, died in 1972. When he died then it was as if the world came crashing in on the FBI. You know Watergate occurred in '73 and after the Watergate disclosures, the Freedom of Information Act came in and all of a sudden, information about COINTELLPRO, all the FBI programs that were designed to counter-act terrorism and bombings in the sixties came to light and then the Congressional Oversight Committees came in and the new guidelines for FBI agents. It was the darkest period of my stay in the FBI.

We were floundering around. A man by the name of Pat Gray was named as acting director of the FBI. Mr. Gray was soon found

to be caught up in the political aspect of Watergate. He had made the statement that certain documents kept in his safe or a safe should never see the light of day. He had actually conspired with others to violate federal law. Then he was removed and then they had a few--Ruckleshaus, Thornberg and a couple of other people served as interim directors. But the FBI was floundering. Public opinion for the first time in my lifetime the FBI was going from the once respected, revered organization to a group of men--then we were all men agents--that apparently had no leadership or respect for law. They said that we had broken in places and committed burglaries and agents were being indicted. Charles,I can't convey to you how I felt about that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: It was a tremendous change. In fact, of course, Watergate was probably really the change. The death of Hoover led to it in the FBI before that really, didn't it?

MR. HILLIN: No, I guess, it was the totality of it. I took it very personally.

DR. CRAWFORD: It was a part of your life. The FBI had been probably the most respected governmental agency in America and suddenly it changed.

MR. HILLIN: I really wondered whether or not the organization would survive. I'd been so proud to join it and I went through some bad times there. I guess there is always a silver lining if you look for it. I latched onto a real good case involving the theft of millions of dollars worth of jewelry.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where was that and why was that a federal case?

MR. HILLIN: A man by the name of Thomas Sircy, who has an I.Q. of 140 and is going to be on radio in Nashville at one o'clock Friday will speak on the life of the organized criminal. He is a brilliant man and has devoted his whole life to criminal activity. I put him in the penitentiary twice. But Tom Sircy and I through the years, even though we were worthy adversaries, we respected each other's positions. I detail a story or two in TENNPAR about Tom.

Anyway, I immersed myself in that period. I said, "Look, I could let myself get and it could knock me off track if I don't get on track. I need to get to work and quit worrying about whether I am going to get in trouble for this or trouble for that."

Then we had troubles here in the Nashville office. Some very unfortunate information got into an FBI file about John Seigenthaler that you probably remember reading about in my book. Some raw information that was unverified got placed in an FBI file. Seigenthaler learned of it through the Freedom of Information Act. Obviously, he was furious that his name would forever have this stigma of FBI file and this sort of thing. He presented it to the public and published the information in his paper. Thereupon, inspectors decended upon the Nashville office.

We were all suspect as to some other irregularities in the Nashville office about this time that represent a thing that I am not going to talk about.

All this happened and Sircy was head of this multi-million dollar jewelry ring that was operating. He still lives in Springfield. So I kept busy working on him with another agent who

is a tremendous agent--one of the top five I have known in my career, Don Birdwell. Birdwell appears in TENNPAR two or three times because he and I were close and are close now. He is an outstanding agent.

Anyway, I have asked Sircy if he would let me write his story. Sircy will not do it because he says there are things in his background that he could still be prosecuted for. *

DR. CRAWFORD: I don't know about the statute of limitations, but the public finds the life of a criminal as interesting as that of anyone because it is so outside the normal course of things.

MR. HILLIN: With you having this interest in this project in Tennessee history, he has influenced Tennessee history. I'd like to introduce you to him. He is a fascinating man and he will sit and talk with you as I am doing here. He is an accomplished criminal having been in crime all his life. If someone would write or get his story, he would set up the most detailed robberies of jewelry stores all through the country.

DR. CRAWFORD: Not just in the Nashville area.

MR. HILLIN: No, in fact, he only hit one or two here. A particular victim of his were the Jordon Marsh Stores in Florida. He would make detailed analyses of how to rob these stores.

* Sircy and his wife were brutally murdered in 1989, and their killers remain unidentified as of 12/1/89. (Henderson Hillin)

He robbed Cain Sloan's then operating over here or had his operatives rob. He had a fourteen-man jewelry ring.

DR. CRAWFORD: He must have had a tremendous pay roll.

MR. HILLIN: He did and I have a book that I kept with the people that were involved in that case. One of these days I am going to write that story I guess if I can get Tom to help me. An absorbing story of crime and criminals and missplaced values. One day he and I were talking and I said, "Tom, what a pity you have wasted your life and administrative ability on crime. You could have been something."

He says, "Hank, there are only a few of us professionals left." He was talking with me as a fellow professional. He felt he was good at what he was doing and he yet respected me for what I do.

DR. CRAWFORD: Apparently, he was good at what he did.

MR. HILLIN: He was good. I give him credit. He was excellent. It took the most detailed work that you ever saw. His attorney was Tom Wiseman who is now the federal judge in Nashville. Judge Wiseman and I occasionally will have a laugh about Tom Sircy.

I want to record this for history because it just came to mind and if I let it drag it will go. We had arrested Sircy one night in Springfield at his house looking for some of this jewelry. On the way back to Nashville, Sircy would never talk. Never. He would brag, but he would not talk about it. On the way back to Nashville, I said, "Tom, why don't you make a clean break of all this, tell everything."

He says, "Hank, I am going to tell you something that will hurt your feelings and you will not believe."

I said, "Well, I'll believe anything after having been an FBI agent this long."

He said, "Hank, my jewelry--he referred to it as my jewelry meaning the stolen jewelry--my jewelry graces the necks of the wifes of many Tennessee politicians throughout this state," and then he laughed.

I said, "Well, give me details."

He said, "Oh no, I'm not going to play that game." (Laughter)

He did. He sold some of the [jewelry] he had in his possession--finest diamonds. What they did immediately after pulling a job, they would pull all the good diamonds out and sell those through another fence or two. He was a broker more than anything. Then he'd keep the cheap stuff--cheap rubies and sapphires and things like that. I don't know how I got off on Tom Sircy. He's a fascinating person. One of these days you and I or someone should memorialize his impact upon crime in United States and Tennessee crime.

DR. CRAWFORD: It would be a fascinating story. Tennessee criminals. [Take the] case of John Morrell. He is a person that most people would rather read about than any real Tennessee heroes.

MR. HILLIN: Anyway, we convicted him and he has done his time and he is back in Nashville as sort of a --Tom has never made a legitimate living. As to his current activities I make no allegations. (Laughter)

DR. CRAWFORD: I wonder if he has reformed!

MR. HILLIN: Don't hold your breath, Dr. Crawford. (Laughter)

Anyway, that was great experience. All of that brought us to the time and all of that had such an influence on us and to the time of Clarence Kelley, at one time head of the FBI in Memphis. He was the special agent in charge of Memphis of the FBI. He later became the Chief of Police in Kansas City. Then he was called upon in 1974 to take the Directorship of the FBI. When he took the Directorship of the FBI, history should somewhere--I tried to do it in my book, but I didn't do an adequate job--of giving him the credit of restoring the FBI and restoring the morale of the FBI and taking this wonderful organization back [and putting it] on track. I detail a story or two of how he came to Nashville and asked for the agents' support.

One particular poignant story I tried to tell as how that day he came to Nashville. He asked me if I would get him a hotel room that he wanted to speak to the agents. Can you imagine Mr. Hoover in a hotel room. With Mr. Hoover you would have had the hotel!

DR. CRAWFORD: He would have been holding court.

MR. HILLIN: I don't mean that as any criticism of Mr. Hoover.

It sounds like criticism on Mr.Hoover, but he was a man that I respected a great deal. I was a Hoover man. He did me a wonderful favor. He sent me to Nashville. I respected him for the job that he did and for the personal favor that he did me in sending me to Nashville, but he just refused to see any fault in anything that he did.

DR. CRAWFORD: He was probably a person who never had doubts.

MR. HILLIN: He never had a doubt that everything he did was the right thing. You've seen that kind of person in school administrations and faculties and. . .

DR. CRAWFORD: They can do a great job because you have a certainty of conviction and singleminded devotion to something, but you can get mistakes made or you can have someone start down the wrong road.

MR. HILLIN: Obviously, we did. One of the first things Mr. Clarence Kelley did was to change immediately for he recognized that we had to stop chasing kids for joy riding in cars that some kid might take and go across the Kentucky state line. What impact on life does that have? Or a black kid in the ghetto where a trailor truck is parked and is part of an interstate shipment and two pairs of pants are taken. An agent might spend days going through that. If it were an $80,000 theft, that is one thing, but a $29.95 theft is another thing. We were wasting our time.

Kelley immediately recognized that and instituted what was known as the "quality case concept". I detail that in the book. This was to save agent time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Maybe you ended up with poor statistics with fewer cases but it was small-time cases.

MR. HILLIN: It was wonderful. It was what the agents had been looking for--the agents who wanted to do the job for years had wanted. Here again, there are agents in the FBI who are closers and agents who are workers. Some agents through their lives--I've heard this over and over again: "my dream in life is

to have thirty cases assigned to me and go through life and never get in trouble, never rock the boat too much, keep my work up and get my overtime up and keep my stats up and then retire and live a happy life."

For some people that is all they want in life.

DR. CRAWFORD: It depends upon what you want, but anyone like that would miss a lot of excitement and challenge and there wouldn't be any enjoyment in their work.

MR. HILLIN: I took crime as an affront to Tennessee. I love this state and my community. When I got assigned a case, I tried to bring passion and commitment to it. After you work it a while you'd see that there was not much to it you could close that case, but some in the FBI we knew as closers and some that were workers. The workers took the big cases and the closers usually gravitated to minor cases.

I'll share this thought with you. I learned as a self-protective kind of a thing in the FBI that we dreaded inspections, Charles. The inspectors would sweep in from Washington and give tests and review work. I learned early on that I guess it was the Peter Principle that they came in and they liked to look at simple cases. They couldn't review every case. You take a deserter case--fugitive deserter case--young boy absents himself without leave from the military and is declared a deserter. Then the only thing in that case file is your activity to locate him. There are certain things you go through.

They liked to look at cases like that--very simple. But if you took the big cases. . . .

DR. CRAWFORD: They could spend forever on them.

MR. HILLIN: And they would be lost in this morass of detail and their buddies back in Washington who were supervising the case back there might get in trouble if they wrote you up. I haven't shared this with anyone else so you are now seeing a picture of the FBI. I don't mean it as critical, but I saw that as if you take the big cases they don't bother you. They never bothered you if you had a big case.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because it was too complicated. They probably have their statistics too. They needed so many reviews in so much time.

MR. HILLIN: In a two-week period of time. You could not review a Hoffa case, you could make a cursory examination of it, or you could not review a massive bank robbery case in a day. So I liked the bigger cases. I stayed out of trouble. I went through the FBI without ever getting a letter of censure in twenty-six years.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you had that number of commendations. (Laughter) You made the right decision there. I see some of the things that it appears wasted agents' time during this time that the local police should have done or someone else could have done, but were good for statistics. What about on the other side of it, Hank? Were there any things that you felt would have been worthy of investigation or the FBI should have been doing something about but did not get into?

MR. HILLIN: Well, in those years Charles, Mr. Hoover had a strict rule that any case involving a political

figure Washington had to be immediately notified and the Bureau advised and kept advised on a daily basis of any allegations of wrongdoing. What we missed in those days was one of the biggest boondoogles in United States--the acquisition and the letting of contracts for the federal interstate highway system. Now, you know yourself that there was more political favoritism in the routing of those routes and . . .

DR. CRAWFORD: Locating of interchanges and things like that.

MR. HILLIN: But through those years to my knowledge, unless it involved actual theft of government property which the government was a party and an interest, we missed all that. Maybe it was good for the country, I don't know, but we got the best interstate system ever that any country has ever had built. But anyway what my point is had we had the guidelines of the racketeering statutes that came into place a little bit later, my prediction was that that would have been the biggest fraud. We would have had massive investigations. But we never got into that.

DR. CRAWFORD: I have seen enough of it to know that there was a great deal of money exchanged between the outside and people in politics. But of course, you didn't have the statutes. When was the anti-racketeering Act and which one was it?

MR. HILLIN: Oh that was enacted into law somewhere around 1972 or '73. It just seemed like everything was getting ready for the Blanton Administration.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who introduced that?

MR. HILLIN: I really don't know. I know when it was enacted, it was the Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Statute.

DR. CRAWFORD: RICO.

MR. HILLIN: Commonly known as RICO. That gave us a lot of jurisdiction, but Charles to be perfectly honest we had a statute prior to that time called the Hobbs Act.

DR. CRAWFORD: When was the Hobbs Act passed? Do you remember?

MR. HILLIN: The Hobbs Act dealt with and was from the forties or the late thirties which meant that any public official that extorted money to influence a public act or official act could be in violation of a federal statute. That was never interpreted during those years. We just didn't get into bribery cases and things that we got into later when we developed a quality case concept. History was changed when Clarence Kelley came in and changed the direction of the FBI. Bless his heart, he is getting up in years now and he has written two or three books and sent me a copy of the recent one. We correspond occasionally. I have the greatest respect for that man and for what he did and what he did for this country. To me, he saved the FBI.

DR. CRAWFORD: He seemed to have when it really needed help after the Watergate thing and the Disclosure and Freedom of Information and the loss of J. Edgar Hoover and so forth.

MR. HILLIN: Then, unfortunately, we are now at the junction where Ray Blanton conducts his campaign with eleven other candidates in the Democratic Primary and gets into this election in Nashville against Lamar Alexander the first time. He

wins the election in 1974 and is inaugurated into office in January 1975. Charles, if there ever was a man whose timing was absolutely atrocious, it was Ray Blanton.

DR. CRAWFORD: You know, I think it was. He was out of time.

MR. HILLIN: "Time is out of joint, O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!"

DR. CRAWFORD: That's a quotation that I have heard. Was that from Hamlet? I have heard it various places, including I think Stanley Horn.

MR. HILLIN: Yes, Hamlet. "There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood. . .

DR. CRAWFORD: "Leads on to fortune; Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. And we must take this current when it serves, or lose our ventures."

MR. HILLIN: Right and he was on the wrong side of the tide.

DR. CRAWFORD: He really came in at the wrong time because of the RICO Act having been passed just before and because of what Watergate had done to the press. They could start digging into this because the Watergate effect was getting down to the state. And even local newspapers were checking into things that they never talked about before.

MR. HILLIN: Everything that we have talked about this morning has laid the groundwork for Ray Blanton to come on the scene as Governor of Tennessee.

DR. CRAWFORD: He came on the scene, but he did not realize how times had changed. You see he had been in the

executive branch when the governor had dominated things and the press would not even touch them. He would send orders down to the legislature, "this is an administration bill," and they would say, "Yes, sir, tell us how to vote."

MR. HILLIN: He ruled by executive order.

DR. CRAWFORD: He did not know how to make the change. You see Winfield Dunn had been in and the legislature had assumed great power because he was Republican and they were Democratic. He had to defer to them--to Ned McWherter and to John Wilder. Ray Blanton came in and tried to do it the way it had been done in the previous decade. You are right. It was bad timing.

MR. HILLIN: Atrocious timing. After he was inaugurated it was just like and we had had four years--I need to make a comment about Winfield Dunn. I didn't know Mr. Dunn. He was a Memphis native, but I met him several times during his administration. During that period of time I was teaching a lot of classes at the Tennessee Law Enforcement Training Academy. He always made it a point to come out whenever a Highway Patrol Class graduated or occasionally he would drop by to see the training that was in progress. I had a chance to meet him and I was very, very much impressed with him as to his character and to his devotion to the office of Governor. The feeling that he wanted to leave office with a reputation of a man highly principled and things like that. So I was impressed with him.

Another thing he did when he went in. He immediately surrounded himself with a number of ex-FBI agents. He wanted to

give this not only an appearance of integrity but actually have integrity in his government. He employed Scott Alden as his Alcohol Beverage Commissioner. Bill Hobbs, former agent I had worked for as Associate Director of the ABC. Bill Sheets was Director of the TBI. He was one of the finest agents I've ever known living in Bradenton, Florida, right now. Bo Turner, now living in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. He pulled all these people in and put them in responsible positions in his government.

When you have men who are devoting their lives to maintaining a good reputation and upholding integrity, you are not going to have problems. But when you set about to recruit people that are questionable and politicos and patronage people, you are setting yourself up for corruption and fraud.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think it has to come down from the top. If the chief executive lets it be known that he is not going to tolerate any wrongdoing it is off to a good start. You are right, you need some good people underneath.

MR. HILLIN: Right. I think that the quality of government is determined by the character of the chief executive. I think he or she sets the tone of the government, the moral character of the government, and like you say sets the limits of flexibility that he or she will tolerate.

DR. CRAWFORD: Apparently that was missing in the Blanton administration.

MR. HILLIN: What people don't realize about Ray Blanton Charles, is that Ray was a lazy governor. When we seized and raided the capitol a number of times we seized his

personal diaries and entry books and log books and things like that. His schedule was one that was not very demanding. He had a rule at the Executive Mansion that no mechanized equipment operated out there until eleven o'clock in the morning.

DR. CRAWFORD: Very strange.

MR. HILLIN: Well, he was sleeping it off.

DR. CRAWFORD: I didn't realize it. (Laughter)

He was setting things up for trouble because if power is left lying around someone else is going to pick it up. It will fill a vacumn.

MR. HILLIN: It will fill a vacumn and he left the administration of his legal counsel's office and gave them wide latitude to handle documents and signings and bills and legislative reponsibilities. He delegated far too much responsibility to Eddie Sisk and his office. It seems like Eddie Sisk recruited the dregs [such as] Charlie Benson, a very corrupt individual in my opinion, and you remember meeting Benson in my book. He recruited him. This was the office that Marie Ragghianti was recruited into by her benefactor.

DR. CRAWFORD: By Eddie Sisk.

MR. HILLIN: By Eddie Sisk. She was naive, not corrupt, but she worked as a clerk up there and then was promoted. McCarter in surplus property was involved in the surplus property fraud cases and sale of surplus state property and the scandals around that. Blanton recruited a man by the name of Shaw to handle his Department of Transportation and he was just an old political crony of his that didn't know anything about running a

huge body of state government that dealt in huge contracts.

DR. CRAWFORD: He had managed a gift shop at Shiloh.

MR. HILLIN: I think that's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: I had been to the place.

MR. HILLIN: He gave his brother tremendous authority to meet with contractors throughout the state who would be bidding on and getting state contracts and gave him an office in the state capitol as a consultant. No one knew what he was doing.

He set himself up with all of these other factors. With the FBI changing its focus, he set himself up for defeat.

DR. CRAWFORD: Asking for trouble. That is sort of a turning point in Tennessee history in some ways as I think Watergate was in the national level. Let me ask you another question or two before we get out of the pre-Blanton period because that is going to be a big topic that we probably ought to cover beginning next time. So I would like to ask a little more about this.

What about the civil rights situation? What was going on that the FBI checked on in Tennessee at this time?

MR. HILLIN: The civil rights activity had pretty much with the advent of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964--and please remind me to give you a copy of an article I wrote for the Tennessean captioned, "Reverend Kelly Miller Smith". It was a tribute I wrote to one of my contacts who was a member of the black community here. I don't know if you knew Dr. Smith or not.

DR. CRAWFORD: No.

MR. HILLIN: He was the pastor of the First Baptist Church on

Capitol Hill. In this tribute Dr. Smith was a wonderful man. He had a great voice. He was a fine handsome looking man who died several years ago, prematurely. He died as a Associate Dean of the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University. That is where he was when he died of cancer about four or five years ago. I wrote this tribute to him that had never come out. His colleagues never knew that at one time--you're talking about Tennessee history--but this man played a tremendous role in the Civil Rights Act of 1963. I don't know whether you want to go back that far.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, I'd like to hear that. I'm interested in this period before we get to the Blanton time.

MR. HILLIN: Okay. It might be better to start with Blanton at a later time.

After I got back from University of Mississippi in 1962, I came back, Charles, tremendously influenced. I never was a bigot or a segregationist or whatever, but I was tremendously influenced by what I had seen.

DR. CRAWFORD: Life is a process of learning,and being Southerners we grew up with one attitude which need not have been bigoted but it was based on what we knew at the time.

MR. HILLIN: At the time--and it is a funny thing you and I sitting here talking about it. I reflect on this a lot. I grew up in a community in which there were farm owners and land owners and there were people who were sharecroppers and then there were a few black families that either sharecropped or worked on the farms. The strange thing about it in the South my family

always loved black people and once my mother spanked me for using a racial slur when I referred to a member of a black family. I was trying to explain this to my daughter, but it taught me proper behavior.

In the South then the blacks ate with you at the table, but if company came, they immediately went to the back of the kitchen and exited from the table so that you would not be embarrassed. It seemed so strange at the time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because that was the custom of the times. Your family had a custom for them to eat with you.

MR. HILLIN: Yes. Blacks were just family. I came up loving blacks, but in a system of segregation--segregated schools, segregated facilities, and you name it. I grew up in a very religious family. I was very touched by Oxford and what I had seen at Ole Miss.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did that change your thinking, Hank?

MR. HILLIN: I guess what had happened down here and I had for the first time gone down there and had seen how ugly and vicious racial bigotry was. Before it was sort of an abstract term really. I had grown up in segregated society and finished a tour of military duty which had a big impact on me. Here was a slender young Air Force veteran who had just come back from defending his country and yet he couldn't enroll in that University. It offended my sense of fair play. I came back and I saw and had to investigate after that night. We interviewed a number of the people who were on the campus. Ole Miss greatly affected my thinking and life, Charles. I was never a bigot

before, but it changed my life. When I got back to Nashville after Ole Miss, the agent in charge of the Memphis office called Dissly saw potential in me. He was the best man I ever saw at delegating authority. He was a quiet soft-spoken man who was agent in charge of Memphis from about 1960 to 1965 through most of the civil rights movement. I never heard him raise his voice. I never heard him chew a subordinate out or chew an agent out. I never saw him discipline anybody, but he had the unquestioned loyalty of every agent in this division. I think back and wonder why we liked him so much? Why did we do what we did for him? He never did any of that.

He would just say, "We've got a problem over here I want dealt with. Why don't you fellows help me over here? " He had that remarkable sense of leadership that made you want to help him succeed.

DR. CRAWFORD: That's leadership if it works.

MR. HILLIN: If it works.

DR. CRAWFORD: It doesn't have to be loud or forceful. I guess it is trust and respect.

MR. HILLIN: I guess that was it. I trusted him completely. I made numerous forays into Mississippi photographing police officers. After the Civil Rights Movement started Dissly liked me and I liked Dissly for I had tremendous respect for the guy. But he liked for me to go down there and I was good at interviewing police officers because I got along with police officers.

Half of the police officers in Mississippi were members of

the Ku Klux Klan at that time. I really hated the Ku Klux Klan. I hated what they were doing. I was good at getting their pictures. I would interview them during the day and make their pictures surreptitiously, unknown to them. We would develop those pictures and show them to civil rights workers at night as suspects in beatings and things like that.

DR. CRAWFORD: And all this experience changed your life and changed your outlook on things. Well, I can understand you were exposed to something you had never had to look at before. That was a learning experience for you. And you brought the lessons back with you.

MR. HILLIN: I brought the lessons back and came back to Nashville,and Dissly said, "I want you to handle contacts with the black community. We're going to have trouble. Tennessee is going to be on the cutting edge of the Civil Rights Movement."

We had already had a lot of trouble. I think Dissly wanted a new approach. So I started handling things with Kelly Miller Smith and Mahlon Williams. I got to know all of the black community leaders at that time. What America didn't know is that these black leaders were very critical of the government and very critical of efforts being made to protect the demonstrators. While they were staging their demonstration, I was in the wings of their churches often or in their offices waiting for them to tell me.

"Okay, today or tomorrow we are going to march on the State Capitol or tomorrow we are going to the Metro Courthouse or we

are going to Morrison's Cafeteria and we expect to have 200 people here and we expect x number of casualties or injuries. "

I was a liaison between the black community and the power structure in Nashville.

I reported this information to the police and then I would send a teletype to Washington that would report on the days activities and say, "Contacts with black leaders in Nashville today indicate that we will have another demonstration. There will be another demonstration again tomorrow or etc. "

DR. CRAWFORD: You were more interested in preventing trouble.

MR. HILLIN: Right. Trying to cut down on trouble.

In this time I met Kelly Miller Smith and in this tribute that I am going to give you before you leave that I wrote to Kelly, I said, "The Civil Rights Act of 1964 should have been named Reverend Kelly Miller Smith. Because he had influenced its passage so much. Nashville was right on the cutting edge of events that led to the passage to the Civil Rights Act of 1964."

It's funny how things like that just sort of, you don't know they are influencing you, but they do. I didn't know I was changing. My values were changing, my approach was changing. Not so much with that, but it seemed like the FBI was such a wonderful place to work. I was getting to have all these experiences that were good for me to experience.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think you had a remarkable bit of luck or destiny or whatever it was to be in the right place for these things to happen. You were the right person to do it. You could have been in any one of many other field offices you know.

MR. HILLIN: I've often wondered if Hoover had not sent me to Nashville at that time what would have happened with my career or happened with . . .

I hope I don't sound arrogant about the Blanton thing. If that case had been assigned to--it sounds arrogant to say this--if that case had been assigned to anybody else the Ray Blanton Case as we know it today would never occurred.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think the fact is you were a bulldog. You had some passion in it and you would not give up. You would see it through. Another person might have seen it the easy way.

MR. HILLIN: It would have been so easy to quit that case.

DR. CRAWFORD: In fact, you had the advantage of knowing Tennessee It was your whole life and background. Yes, another person clearly would have approached it with different backgrounds and different insights than what you did.

MR. HILLIN: If a person, let's say from New Jersey or something had gotten that case and he or she didn't take it as an affront to the government of Tennessee and to the state--you know, you have this passion, Charles, for Tennessee and its history the same as I do--he had seen it differently. So what, you close a little old case on a governor that was trying to do what they've done down here for years. Say who cares!

DR. CRAWFORD: It is easy to be complacent about it.

MR. HILLIN: It would have been very easy to have closed that case.

DR. CRAWFORD: Still it turned out not to be that way, you know.

That was a major case--sending a state governor to jail and creating something in Tennessee history that had never happened before. Corruption had, but for the chief executive official of the state to be held accountable and made to pay for it, that was new and it had never happened before.

MR. HILLIN: Never happened before. He was the first governor convicted of a serious crime. I don't know of any other governor convicted of anything!

DR. CRAWFORD: I don't know, but in Tennessee it had never happened here before.

MR. HILLIN: I mean in Tennessee. I'm sure other governors had been convicted. Probably in colonial days perhaps.

DR. CRAWFORD: It was a combination of things. You're being here and at the same time and these things having happened before--Acts passed, to change the direction of the FBI that really set the stage. When he began his administration in January 1975 and started down the road that he did, it was set up for there.

MR. HILLIN: It was a funny thing, I think I am ahead of the story and we will get into TENNPAR in detail at our next meeting, but I think I told you and I detailed it in TENNPAR. The first day we raided the Capitol, no, it was the second time we raided the Capitol, I called Stanley Horn and asked him when was the last time the Capitol had been raided?

Stanley told me, "Henderson, it was 1862, I think, when Federal troops stormed the Capitol." (Laughter) He was a grand

old man.

DR. CRAWFORD: He knew how things fitted together.

MR. HILLIN: He did.

DR. CRAWFORD: What we will do, Hank, is draw the curtain and open the stage with Blanton being sworn in in January 1975 next time.

THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THE PROJECT IS RECENT TENNESSEE POLITICAL HISTORY. THE DATE IS FEBRUARY 4, 1989. THE PLACE IS NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEW IS WITH HENDERSON HILLIN. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE. TRANSCRIBED BY BETTY WILLIAMS. INTERVIEW II.

DR. CRAWFORD: Hank, let's try to get the picture of what Tennessee was like, as you saw it, in 1974. You had been back home since you were transferred by J. Edgar Hoover to Nashville. And you had dealt with various forms of crime and I know the laws had changed a little and you were ready to deal with some more things. In fact, I think you needed a challenge with the situation in the FBI being what it was. Let's start, if we can, with your recollections of the election of 1974 with the close of Winfield Dunn administration and the beginning of the Ray Blanton administration then and your impressions before you began to receive information about any wrong doing. What do you remember about that election and that period?

MR. HILLIN: My recollection, Charles, is that there were a number of candidates in the Democratic Primary for governor at that time. It is my recollection that there were either 11 or 12. I couldn't begin to name all of them except to tell you I don't mind to tell you who my candidate was. That was in the time when there was a vacumn in the leadership in the Democratic party. Different people, I think Stanley Snodgrass

attempted to get the nomination. And of course, Ray Blanton had entered the primary. Tom Wiseman was in and David Pack was in. There was just candidate after candidate. I think even Franklin Haney was in. There was a vacumn in the Democratic party. I supported Tom Wiseman who later became federal judge in Nashville. He had represented a client who at one time I had pursued and put in the penitentiary twice. I mentioned it in the TENNPAR book--Thomas Leroy Sircy. Sircy thought highly of him. Though I was not an admirer of Sircy's character or his trade, he was very good at what he did, being a top jewel thief with an intelligence quotient of 140.

At that time the Democratic party had this vacumn and they nominated Ray Blanton. As I recall he came out of the primary with something like 22 percent of the vote and yet he was the clear winner in the field. Then he went up against the Republican nominee, Lamar Alexander.

For some reason I got mixed up in two or three important investigations at that time and I really missed a lot of the fighting between Alexander and Blanton, but from what I had heard I could not see how Alexander could lose to him.

But I was mixed up in an investigation of some stolen money orders and also an investigation of Sircy about that time. Of course, this is about the time that Mr. Hoover had died in '72 and the congressional oversight committees were coming along. Watergate came along in '73 or it might have been at about the same time. L. Patrick Gray became Director of the FBI and he soon became involved in the Watergate snare. It was really a tough

time for the FBI.

Most everybody in the FBI was keeping their head down really. But this was the political picture and in the election of 1974 Blanton won the election. There was a lot of early talk around Nashville that you'd better watch and bolt down the Capitol because they were going to steal the Capitol. But that didn't really mean anything. And we really had no mandate to go after anybody in the political process.

We, meaning the FBI, had stayed away from political cases. So Blanton really came in with very little fanfare. I really don't remember his inauguration except I have seen pictures of it since. It was apparently a cold and bad day and it was an ill wind that did no one any good.

DR. CRAWFORD: I remember that inauguration. Now, your recollections of 1974. . . .

MR. HILLIN: Now after you have refreshed my recollection. It is amazing how you can be refreshed. I remember when I went in the election voting booth in that election--in that election between Lamar Alexander and Ray Blanton I had no candidate. That is one of the few elections that I did not choose a candidate.

DR. CRAWFORD: I know how you felt.

MR. HILLIN: I remember that I told my wife--I said, "I am not ready to vote for Lamar Alexander." I did not choose a candidate. Anyway, Ray Blanton got into office without my vote. So he became our 44th governor. There is so much detail about this in the TENNPAR book that there is no need to go into

all that except to say things rocked along . We heard little or nothing except soon after he came in there [it] just became general [rumor]. In law enforcement work, Charles, you have talk on the street. It is not qualified as criminal information, but it is like any other, it is intelligence information. Soon thereafter, the word got out on the street that "you could do business with this administration." I put that in quotes "do business" with this administration. That was duly noted but keep in mind that we had no mandate to investigate anything.

The FBI was still rocking along and the next thing we heard was the patronage committees were organized throughout the counties and you had to see a certain person or committee to get anything done in these certain counties. I just attributed that to politics and that didn't make any impression.

Then the word came down and the first thing that I heard was about the surplus property case--that if you were willing to submit the maiden name of your wife to certain people up there that you could buy a car at ridiculously low surplus price. It was almost a give-away if you were in the inner circle.

DR. CRAWFORD: State employees could not buy it in their own name of course?

MR. HILLIN: Oh no. State employees had to use code names and hidden names and patrons. We heard about that. In fact, I heard of a man who had bought a car like that. I knew that wasn't right, but I knew there wasn't anything we could do about it at that point. That sort of grew and then grew into an investigation. The next thing I heard that TBI was investigating

that. Then, I got word that the TBI agents who were investigating that particular phase of it were, as I detailed in the book, one of them was sent to one end of the state and the other one the other end because they were asking questions about Leonard Blanton, the governor's father, who had bought some of that property and even bought some of it in the name of a county district that he had some interest in down in Adamsville.

Also, I began hearing that you could buy your way out of the penitentiary if you knew the right people. Soon thereafter, the word got on the street that a man had come to Nashville with a sack of money. That he didn't know who to see, but that he had hung around Capitol Hill for three or four days till somebody took his sack of money. When I got into the case, I checked that file. His son got out a month or two after the sack of money alledgedly was delivered.

Then they sort of divided the state up. I heard that Gene Blanton had an office next to the governor on Capitol Hill. No one knew what his duties were.

DR. CRAWFORD: This was the governor's brother of course. He was stationed or had space in the State Capitol. Did he have an official job? I never knew that.

MR. HILLIN: The Governor called him an advisor or consultant to the Governor. He actually drew some state money. He had a state driver, a highway patrolman he had asked for. He spent a lot of his time. . .B and B Contruction was supposed to stay out bidding on state jobs, but it was pretty obvious that they were not out of the business--that they had set up straw

companies and straw men and were dealing through them. Gene was very busy taking bids and setting up road building and construction contracts. They were getting the state set up to be cut apart during this first year.

Then, at some point early--he was inaugurated in '75 and early '76 was when Clarence Kelley, the Director of the FBI, felt that he could inaugurate his campaign to start the FBI back on the road to recovery. So he inaugurated this quality case concept. Henceforth, the FBI would not investigate two pairs of pants being stolen from an interstate shipment at the railyards or a young person joyriding across the state line and tie up federal agents and federal court time. Thereafter, we were going to concentrate on political corruption, acts of corruption by politcal leaders, foreign counter-intelligence and organized crime activities. He was going to use the 8,000 agent force in a much more efficient way to restore the FBI to the premier law enforcement agency that he felt it was.

He came to Nashville at some point. It is interesting in Tennessee history that Clarence Kelley had been the agent in charge of the Memphis FBI office in years past. He was a highly respected agent. He was an "agent's agent." He knew the ropes. He was a wonderful person. I correspond with him and he's written a couple of books. He sends me his books. I send him mine. He is a great American. In my opinion the United States owes him a great debt of gratitude for restoring the reputation of the FBI with his character and with instituting these reforms in the FBI.

So that is where we were at the point he came to Nashville.

I detail it in the book how he asked me to get him a motel room at the Rodeway. If you can imagine having grown up in the Hoover era. Mr. Hoover was a little bit more formal and. . .

DR. CRAWFORD: And would have wanted an imperial setting.

MR. HILLIN: (Laughter) That's exactly it. They accused the Nixon administration of having the imperial setting and it would have been a formal meeting hall and he would have made a short address. Kelley had us all come in and we sprawled all over the floor and he said, "Look, fellows, I must have some help." He said, "I'm going to take this organization up and I need you all to get behind me and we are going to work these cases and I am going to free you on these other cases. But I need your help--the agent in the field." Boy, I felt he was speaking directly to me. It just showed you the absolute horrible timing of Ray Blanton to be elected about that time.

He was a logical choice. As I think I have told you, Ray Blanton and I have an amazing set of similarities in our background. He was born 4-10-1930, and in a small town and on a small farm in West Tennessee, 130 miles from the farm where I grew up. I was born 10-4-30. We both grew up and went to country schools, and went to college about the same time and got out of college, and married about the same time. He had three children and I had four children. He taught school for a while and I taught school for a while. He entered government service and family business and I entered the army and went into the FBI, but our lives have paralleled one another. He had one brother two years younger than he. I had a brother two years younger than I.

He had an older sister and I luckily had four older sisters. So there our lives came together though in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1975 as if, I don't believe as if foreordained, but it was almost as if some force brought us together in 1975 in Nashville.

The two country boys who would affect Tennessee history.

DR. CRAWFORD: Despite all the similarities though, Hank, there was one noticeable difference. That was which side of the law you were on.

MR. HILLIN: Well, I'll tell you what. I had gone to a Christian college and I had a strong mother. One of the things my mother had always and the last thing she said to you as you went out the door was always remember your name. As a kid I didn't know what she was talking about. I know now what she meant, but that was what she would say. "Always remember your name."

DR. CRAWFORD: One of the strongest incentives is whether one brings honor and credit or whether they bring discredit to the family name.

MR. HILLIN: Yes, I haven't thought about that a long time. "Always remember your name." Anyway, she would tell you that and it was a huge incentive, I guess, to try to do right. But we did, we came together--I as the FBI agent and number two man in the FBI office who would handle those kind of cases. He is the 44th Governor of the State. The state was ripe for picking.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, Tennessee for background for this thing has had a long tradition of exchange of money between

financial interests in the private sector and in people who were supposedly serving the public, having been elected to office by them. I suppose the public construction--highway construction where the money was--has been a major part of that through the years. In fact, I know it has these last years through the Browning administration, and political money had been collected and so forth. It was his background because he had come up through that since he had been in construction himself.

So, I am sure he understood the importance of money in politics and also was familiar with the use of money being contributed from the outside not to mention his previous political experience. So you had some people who might call it a corrupt or unholy alliance, but certainly you did have one between outside money and people who were there in office supposedly serving the public good. Of course, he went into office knowing about this and how it operated.

When and how did the FBI in Tennessee decide to get into this matter of political corruption?

MR. HILLIN: Well, it was after Kelley put out his directive that this was where we were going to move. Soon thereafter, it was almost within a matter of short time we received the complaint about his Commissioner of Real Estate who wanted money from this lady who was trying to pass the real estate brokers test. His name was Don Harding. This was really the first case that we had. She came to the FBI and was a Memphis real estate agent.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was her name?

MR. HILLIN: I cannot remember her name. I remember she came to the Memphis office and she cooperated with us and Corbett Hart (C-O-R-B-E-T-T) was the agent handling the money with her and arranged for a payoff. He took $300 and we covered the meet and actually arrested him as he took the money and then we had a simultaneous search of his office at the Capitol.

My job in all that after it was done was to call the Governor. This was my first contact with Ray Blanton. No, it wasn't. I had already interviewed him about an election law case. Early in his administration I met the Governor in an allegation that had been filed against him in connection with the Senate election against Howard Baker.

I had investigated early in his administration there had been a complaint about that and I had gone to the executive mansion to interview him and to tell him that these allegations had been made--the allegations that he had used some people who had made illegal contributions to his campaign. And this was to give him a chance to respond to the charges. Early in the administration we had this confrontation out there and he had Millard Oakley, then Commissioner of Insurance and Banking, with him as his attorney during that confrontation. He was very upset that I would even question him about any allegation of wrongdoing. He was very icy.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was this early in his administration?

MR. HILLIN: Yes. This was sometime in 1975.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was this his first year in office?

MR. HILLIN: Yes, first year in office.

DR. CRAWFORD: This was concerning allegations about events five years before in the campaign against Howard Baker for the U. S. Senate?

MR. HILLIN: Right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was Millard Oakley an attorney?

MR. HILLIN: Yes, he was also a licensed Tennessee attorney. I can remember going in that Florida room in the mansion and Blanton had positioned himself where the sunlight came through in our eyes and he was sitting back. It was difficult to see. Darrell Hamer, another agent, had gone in with me. And Oakley was behind him (Blanton) and not sitting on a level with him, but behind him.

He (Blanton) said, "I understand you want to see me, " or something to that effect. There was no small talk or this sort of thing.

So I explained the charges and I told him that I was pretty much into the investigation and he had a right to hear what he was being investigated about and to explain to him the charge and what it was and that he had certain rights under the constitution.

After I had done all that I could see that he was getting angry and more angry. I could just see the level rising. Finally, I asked him to sign the form. It was a Miranda Form that you ask criminal suspects to assert that they had been advised of their rights and that there is no trickery going on. They know exactly what is going on and knew every constitutional right that had been outlined to them. He shook his head and he says, "I'm not going to sign that thing." He then looked at his hands and

said, "Hillin, you see this hand," and he pointed and gestured to his hand.

DR. CRAWFORD: His right hand?

MR. HILLIN: Yes, his right hand just like this. He says, "This hand has shaken million dollar deals and you are the first person who has ever questioned my integrity before."

Oakley said, "Aw come on Governor, sign the form. It is just routine. They do this all the time."

He said, "I am not going to sign it."

So, I read it to him. It wasn't a big deal or anything. And I said, "I've read the above form to Governor Blanton." Unfortunately, I don't know what happened to that form. I guess it is in some FBI file somewhere. But anyway, we went on to talking. The interview was very unsatisfactory. He claimed he knew nothing. He said, "I am no bookkeeper. I knew nothing about campaign contributions. "

The allegation was that he had pocketed the money that had come in for campaign contributions by putting it in his pocket and using it as ordinary income or used it for himself. He said, "I know nothing about that." He tried really to dismiss us with "see my bookkeeper" type.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did he seem concerned about the details of it?

MR. HILLIN: No, he seemed arrogant and unconcerned about it.

We made no headway as far as the investigation was concerned. But an interesting thing that I detailed in the book was that it was my first time to be in the executive residence of the Governor of Tennessee. I was a little awed by it if you want

to know the truth.

It is a beautiful mansion--a gorgeous place. I must have said something about what a wonderful place and beautiful place it was. I think he tried then to recover something or do something in the public relations field. I must have said that I was a Tennessee native or something.

He said, "Well, how would you like to see Thomas Jefferson's desk that we have here at the mansion?"

My gosh, I had no idea that we had a treasure like that in Tennessee! I said, "Well, Governor, I would be delighted. I had no idea that Tennessee owned Thomas Jefferson's desk."

He said, "Yes, it is in my study if you'll follow me back."

So Hamar and I followed him back to a beautiful little study back there. There was a cherry secretary--nice wonderful piece of furniture, but it obviously was not in the Jefferson era. The Governor went directly to it and pulled open a drawer and there inside--oh, it was a bad time--it got our relationship off to a bad start. There inside was an inscription: "The desk of Woodrow Wilson, presented to Tennessee by the Woodrow Wilson Society of Tennessee," or something like that. I can't remember the group that [gave it]. The Governor looked down at it and I could feel his humiliation. I tried to make [some small talk].

I said, "Governor, one good thing about it, they were both Democrats." (Laughter)

He didn't laugh. To me it was kind of funny and Hamar kind of laughed, but the Governor didn't laugh. He disappeared after that. An aide sort of took us down to the door. That was it.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was Mr. Hamar's first name?

MR. HILLIN: D-A-R-R-E-L-L Hamar--H-A-M-A-R. He had another section of the investigation of Eddie Sisk in that. Eddie Sisk was campaign manager for that election and we interviewed him a little bit later. That was my first confrontation with Eddie Sisk, the Governor's legal counsel.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was the first time you had met Governor Ray Blanton and it was not a very successful meeting.

MR. HILLIN: No, it was a fiasco if you want to know the truth. It was heightened and capped off by this unfortunate mistake. I really think he thought he had Thomas Jefferson's desk out there in the state.

DR. CRAWFORD: Otherwise he would have said otherwise.

MR. HILLIN: But it was a little interesting sidelight in Tennessee history that had happened.

DR. CRAWFORD: I remember those election laws charges. Were they ever pressed? Did anything ever come of it?

MR. HILLIN: Yes, I felt like we had an adequate case against the Governor. And we strongly pushed for prosecution with the United States Attorney's office and U.S. Department of Justice. The Justice Department was very reluctant to prosecute a sitting governor. They really had very little interest in prosecuting him. So, finally a man named Frank Phillips had a company down in Memphis called the Southwestern Trucking Company or something like that, that had made these illegal contributions. They allowed him to plead the corporation guilty to an election violation involving a federal election.

They gave the company a thousand dollar fine and put it on probation for a year or something like that. It was a slap on the wrist.

That was my entry into the political investigation era or area and I had a bad taste in my mouth right from the very beginning.

DR. CRAWFORD: I believe if I remember correctly that Frank Phillips was put on his Shelby County Patronage Committee when it was organized. I think that was the first place I remember seeing his name.

MR. HILLIN: Frank Phillips later became prominent in the Blanton administration. He was also not only a political [sort], he was a close personal friend of the governor and he and the girl friends often traveled together. Later on, he was placed as the senior member on the Alcohol and Beverage Commission and ruled on the awarding of liquor licenses throughout the state which became the vehicle for which we actually prosecuted the Governor after he left office. But Frank Phillips was a close personal friend and the Governor moved him up rapidly. The Governor completely discounted this early investigation. It was not the most substantial thing, but it really was my start with Ray Blanton.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think political leaders often turn a great deal to friends, relatives and people who have been close to them through the years. I suppose there is a lot of loneliness really at the top in politics when everyone wants something. People can't be trusted. Perhaps the important thing

is the integrity and the quality in the people that they turn to. You saw some examples of that in this case.

MR. HILLIN: Well, we rocked along after that. Then, we were hearing all this stuff, Charles , about corruption and the prisoners being able to buy themselves out. Then we had this case involving the Commissioner of Real Estate. Then the first real break came when Marie Ragghianti came forward. She was the Chairwoman of the Pardon and Parole Board in Tennessee. She came forward and she actually went to the FBI indirectly through a District Attorney, Richard Fisher, who put her in touch with an agent down in Cleveland, Tennessee.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did that happen? From Nashville?

MR. HILLIN: As Chairwoman of the Pardon and Parole Board she naturally came to know a lot of District Attorneys General and came to know them well and came to know Richard Fisher real well. He is now Assistant District Attorney General in Nashville prosecuting child abuse cases. She came to trust him that she could go to him with her suspicions. She went to him and told him that she had suspicions about the way the Pardon and Parole Board was operating and that certain people might be buying their way out. And that she had worked in Eddie Sisk's office as legal counsel for about a year at this time and before this.

DR. CRAWFORD: She must have had early suspicions. Hank, in my own historical research around the state, I've talked to a retired newspaperman she talked to at some point earlier before she went to officials to ask what to do about it. How did she get into this position as Chairman of the State Pardon

and Parole Board?

MR. HILLIN: She had been a student at Vanderbilt. She was divorced and had to go back to work to better prepare her for a position. She went back to school at Vanderbilt and my understanding was she became involved in a local Democratic Club on the campus and Eddie Sisk came to represent Governor Blanton at some function out there. She came to know him. This is the official story. After Blanton won the election and thereafter she had seen that he won the election and she applied for a position. That is the official story.

DR. CRAWFORD: Sometimes there is an official story and sometimes there is another story.

MR. HILLIN: Probably the more accurate story was that she and Eddie Sisk became very close friends and had a very close relationship. Whether or not it went any further than that I don't know, but they became very good friends and he even after I came to know her, she often told me that he came by at night to talk to her. Even though they worked together at the office in the daytime, they spent a lot of time together. Even when she came forward, she could not bring herself to work against him. I would ask her to wear a hidden tape recorder against him and to set up a fake commutation process where we could trap him. She said she couldn't do that.

DR. CRAWFORD: That must have been a dilemma for her to feel she was involved in something criminal and at the same time be loyal to the man who was her supervisor, wasn't it?

MR. HILLIN: Yes, he was her supervisor and her benefactor.

DR. CRAWFORD: He had given her a job.

MR. HILLIN: He had given her a job when she was down and out. I understand that. One of the problems that I had all the way through dealing with her is that she was unmanageable.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you mean unpredictable?

MR. HILLIN: No, unpredictable and unmanageable. You know, when you take over a case like this, when you are working a major case and your chief informant, you have got to manage that informant's activities or otherwise you give them some leeway and a framework in which to work, Charles. But the agent, if he or she is any good, is going to manage the operation and say, "Look, this is where we need to probe, and this is where we need to probe, and this sort of thing." She was unpredictable. On one occasion, she came in and said, "I am going to hold a press conference and tell the world."

I said, "You can't do that!" We had a hurried meeting and I went into great detail in the book when she did that. Her lawyer at that time was Bill Leach, former Attorney General of the state. Leach, in my opinion,was a true hero of this whole story and I give him credit in the book.

DR. CRAWFORD: I would think he could use some wise counsel. I trust the press conference was not given?

MR. HILLIN: Oh no. Later I found out she also was meeting with a newspaperman here in Nashville by the name of Larry Brinton, a very prominent Banner reporter at that time. He was after the news so he was not approaching this thing from the same thing as I was. I was looking for prosecutable evidence.

DR. CRAWFORD: And of course, he was interested in news. Did he have a personal relationship with her. Were they dating one another?

MR. HILLIN: No, nothing like that came out, but they respected one another and saw each other a lot.

DR. CRAWFORD: He, of course, wanted news and you were interested in evidence.

MR. HILLIN: He would call me up. Of course, I had no idea that she was meeting with him. He would call me up and ask me questions that soon it didn't take me long to put two and two together that she was talking with him in addition to talking with me. There were so many problems with Marie Ragghianti that we were getting nowhere.

This is in late October, 1976. We had gotten the case open by this time. I got a call one morning from George Haynes, who was then a TBI agent. Haynes said, "Hank, I know about your case. It is no secret up here on The Hill." I thought it was a secret.

DR. CRAWFORD: If TBI knew, you had to be concerned, didn't you?

MR. HILLIN: I was very concerned. He says, "Look, I've got an informant in the legal counsel's office and they are dry cleaning those files up there. If you are ever going to get anything, you better get up there because they are purging those files and in the Corrections Department too."

So I raced to the U.S. Attorney and told him that I had solid information and that I needed for him to make a dramatic move and I wanted subpoenas for all of the records of the state including the Capitol and the Corrections Department and the Board of Pardon

and Parole. Charlie Anderson was the U.S. Attorney at that time and he took a couple of deep gulps and cautioned me about the politics. But he went along with it and the next day was after the FBI had had our firing session. I put together a raiding team that would hit over here at the Correction Department and one at the Pardon and Parole Board and one at the Capitol. So with simultaneous hits, we hit all three and we took everything out. I mean we took every record. We actually closed them down. We took all the records out. You can imagine what that did as far as the television news got it. It went all over the state that the FBI raids State Capitol and this was in late October of 1976.

DR. CRAWFORD: There was no way you could keep that a secret?

MR. HILLIN: Oh no. From that point on they knew that we had a federal probe of course. We started then calling witnesses before the federal grand jury. About that time, Charles Anderson was going out as United States Attorney. So he sent the case back to the Department of Justice--the Public Integrity Section--for further prosecutive handling in anticipation of the new U.S. Attorney who was coming in, Hal Hardin.

When he did that, a new prosecutor came on the line by the name of Andy Reich. Mr. Reich started handling grand jury sessions. We were getting nowhere. We would have a grand jury session every month and no indictments.

Finally, nothing was happening and I was seeing we were being slow-walked by the Department of Justice. Finally, I couldn't get any prosecution. We had built a substantial case. Bill Cole was cooperating with us. He had bought his way out of

prison for $12,000. Tommy Prater had paid a considerable amount of money and he was cooperating.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where was Bill Cole from?

MR. HILLIN: Chattanooga. Most of the cases centered around a fixer in Chattanooga by the name of William Thompson--Bill Thompson. Bill Thompson was a ward heeler and a small time hoodlum in Chattanooga. He had an ongoing relationship with Eddie Sisk who was the Governor's legal counsel. He was in effect selling pardons and paroles.

Finally, I couldn't understand why they wouldn't prosecute. I had built this case with all this evidence and we had this grand jury evidence and we had cooperating witnesses and the files were full of corroborating information. I couldn't get them to indict anyone.

Finally, the Department of Justice told me that they were closing the case down. There would be no prosecution.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was 1976 or '77 by then?

MR. HILLIN: By then we had gone through '77 and this was early '78. I had investigated the case for a year and a half thinking that next month they would indict someone or the next month they would indict someone. We had expended manpower and the FBI had thousands of dollars invested in this case. The people of Tennessee expected something to happen. My attorney in the Department of Justice called me and said that, "No prosecution is going to be had. His boss had ruled that the case was not prosecutable."

So in an unprecedented move we organized a group of Tennessee

FBI from Knoxville, the Special Agent in charge in Knoxville, Harold Swanson; the agent in charge of the Chattanooga office, Irv Wells; Joe Trimbach, the agent in charge of Memphis for whom I worked. I went to Washington. This was unheard of in Hoover's day. He would have never questioned a decision.

DR. CRAWFORD: And have a statewide delegation?

MR. HILLIN: Well, you just wouldn't question it. In Hoover's day you took your lumps and that was it. You would never question a decision from on high. I felt strongly about this and I felt the winds were blowing differently. I had been told and Kelley had gotten me really fired up with this thing.

Amazingly, the FBI headquarters backed us on this. We had a high level meeting with the lawyer who headed the Public Integrity section, a man named Tom Henderson. I spoke for an hour and forty-five minutes presenting the facts of the case to him and these other lawyers. He sat there and if he had acted like a jerk I could have understood, but he was so understanding. He asked questions. After the presentation was all over, he said, "I had no idea this case was this substantial." It had been going on for two years and we had been investigating a governor. He didn't know the case was that substantial. He said, "I think all that we need is a flow chart." Man, I looked at him and he said,"Then we could follow this case a little better."

I'm standing there [puzzled] saying to myself,"A flow chart!" This was going through my head. I had just spoken for an hour and forty-five minutes and here's a man that needs a flow chart.

He said, "Go back to Tennessee and prepare me a flow chart

with the facts of this case as they flow as you have described them here and he outlined a couple of interviews." He had his subordinate in a later meeting outline the exact details that he wanted done. Then he said, "We'll take another look at it."

Well, I had no idea that we were victims of a shell game. We were being gotten out of town. So he got us out of town feeling like a million dollars.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who was the attorney you were speaking with in the Justice Department?

MR. HILLIN: Tom Henderson.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you had gone with the Tennessee FBI agents to FBI headquarters in Washington and they had supported you. You went up the chain of command from there to the Justice Department that was where?

MR. HILLIN: Right across the street in Washington, D.C. We presented the facts of this case.

DR. CRAWFORD: After your Washington meeting at the Department of Justice, you returned to Tennessee and drew everything up in a flow chart thinking it would produce results. Then what happened, Hank?

MR. HILLIN: Then I get this call from Andy Reich, the lawyer handling the case in Tennessee--the young lawyer. He said, "This time it is final, Hank. It is all over. There will be no prosecution in this case." I was devastated! I mean that. He said a letter would follow and the Department of Justice sent a letter to Sisk and the Governor, I think, that there would be no more investigation. I just closed my desk. I don't even

know if I signed out or what. I went home after I got that. I was sort of whipped down.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they give reasons?

MR. HILLIN: They said, "The case didn't lend itself to successful prosecution. " which is a coverall for many many things. That could be that they didn't feel that the facts didn't warrant prosecution.

But the fact of the matter was that Blanton was a Tennessee Democrat in the South. By this time Jimmy Carter had taken over the Justice Department. We would later find out that Blanton had been in close touch with Carter and with Griffin Bell, the Attorney General about this case. It was a political fix in my opinion. We all knew cases. We had over 100 years of FBI experience in that room with that attorney. We weren't about to go out on the limb on something that wasn't creditable.

I soon recovered my composure though and went back to work. I had never closed the case. Some of the agents asked me, "Aren't you going to send all those files back to Memphis?" I had raided all this stuff.

I said, "No."

They said, "Well, isn't that case over?"

I said, "That case may be over, but I had some other areas." So I kept it alive. I kept probing around the areas. I had another lead or two. We kept probing. This was in February of 1978. I kept the case going along until I heard that there was some corruption in Memphis and there were some people talking down there.

I coordinated with an agent in Memphis, Corbitt Hart, that I have mentioned before. He was conducting an investigation down there and he had heard the same thing that you could deal with this administration on pardons and paroles.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have the names of who the dealers were in Memphis? You had Prater and Thompson in Chattanooga.

MR. HILLIN: No, at this point there was an Alcohol and Beverage Commission agent down there named Ernest Withers. He was putting out the word that he could handle things. But it was nothing like what we had before. So they continued their probe in Memphis. They were making some headway. He had indicated the he could help somebody. By this time in Memphis they had recruited a man by name of Baldwin. Baldwin was a cocaine dealer and a topless and bottomless nightclub operator.

DR. CRAWFORD: Art Baldwin?

MR. HILLIN: Arthur Baldwin.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was his background? How did he happen to be in position to have influence? He would have just recently come to Tennessee, I think.

MR. HILLIN: Right,from Oklahoma. He was a crime figure in Oklahoma, but he made it a point to ingratiate himself with political figures and a high roller. He sold cocaine and had been charged with that. He was looking for a deal from the government. So they cut a deal with him for cooperation. Also he was making pay-off deals to keep his club operating to this Withers person--this ABC agent. That was really his contact.

So with one of his contacts with Withers, Withers remarked that, "I've got people up in Nashville that I can handle other things with." When Baldwin reports this back to the FBI agent handling him, the FBI agent says, "We'll find out what he can do." Then the discussion turned to: "Can you get somebody out of the penitentiary?" At this point we were all trying to revive TENNPAR. That is going on at that time.

About that time Sheryl Leverett came forward and she tells the FBI and becomes my informant and tells that she had been offered a chance to get her husband out of the penitentiary if she could come up with $10,000 in Nashville.

DR. CRAWFORD: This is Sheryl Leverett. She was a Nashville resident?

MR. HILLIN: She was a Middle Tennessee resident.

DR. CRAWFORD: So you had East, Middle and West Tennessee all apparently involved.

MR. HILLIN: Which indicated that it was statewide conspiracy. Sheryl Leverett had been approached by her lawyer, Dale Quillen, a Nashville lawyer, and told that she could get her husband out of the penitentiary. So she reports that about the same time that this thing hits down in Memphis. So I start operating the deal against Sheryl Leverett and Corbitt Hart begins operating Art Baldwin and we start feeding him names and money.

Baldwin says he wants to meet the principal and he doesn't want to deal though a middle man. Baldwin sets him up and his principal comes to Memphis and it turns out to be Blanton's head of Security Detail, Lieutenant Charles Frederick Taylor.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who had been on the Tennessee Highway Patrol?

MR. HILLIN: Well he was still on the Highway Patrol, but no one seemed to know what his duties were at this point. He was a floater. He just roamed around. What he did all day was make deals and pick up money. He reported to no one. He could go to Memphis whenever he wanted to. He hung around the Governor's office. He hung around the Legal Counsel's office.

Anyway he showed up as the man that could make deals. So we start taping conversations between Taylor and Baldwin and feeding him money and feeding names into the system--names that we came up with that had no merit at all as to commutation. Then they start generating paperwork which builds evidence in the case. At one point we fed the name in of the most notorious criminal in Tennessee, Larry Hacker. Hacker was a horrible criminal with a long series of escapes and there was nothing to warrant commutation or consideration of him.

DR. CRAWFORD: What charges was he in the penitentiary for?

MR. HILLIN: For bank robbery, armed robbery, escape, habitual criminal. There was nothing that really warranted any consideration for him. But through Baldwin we told Taylor to check with his people and that we would pay up to $100,000 to have him released. Well, that got their attention.

DR. CRAWFORD: That would get attention!

MR. HILLIN: That would get attention. And to further this, we presented $50,000 as show money.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that $50,000 real money?

MR. HILLIN: Cash money. Yes, it was real money. You can

imagine the motel room with a sachel full of money-$50,000. In 1978 it was worth a lot more than it is now.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was worth at least twice of what it is worth now with inflationary considerations.

MR. HILLIN: So he says, "Yes, we can handle this deal." So he generated the paperwork that would have started Larry Hacker being released from the penitentiary.

DR. CRAWFORD: Taylor did?

MR. HILLIN: Taylor did. So we had that working. We are now moving into late 1978. I'm moving along with Sheryl Leverett getting her husband's paperwork and paying money to her.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you get information to present in court as evidence of this? Were these meetings taped?

MR. HILLIN: These were video taped and audio taped. [There were] hidden cameras.

DR. CRAWFORD: They had to meet in selected motels you'd rigged, I suppose?

MR. HILLIN: Yes. You have to do some pre-planning. Evidence carefully preserved and finally we were at the point where we had spent thousands and thousands of dollars. We had Taylor fly to Memphis with a signed document--signed "Ray Blanton for Larry Hacker and others."

On that day we tried to turn Taylor and get him to cooperate with us and then we would have brought it back and seen how far it would have gone. But he would not cooperate. So we could not turn it so we arrested Taylor on December 15, 1978, and

on the same date we set it up where Benson, the aide in Sisk's office would bring this document to him in Memphis. We arrested him with a signed commutation document, $3300 in marked money and Sisk had marked money on him the same day and Taylor had marked money on him. We made a sweep and then searched everybody and searched the Legal Counsel's office and searched the Capitol. That pretty much was the physical part of TENNPAR. But after TENNPAR there was a lot of cleaning up to do and lot of work to do. We brought in a crew of 22 agents that I supervised. We began the work of the bid-rigging investigations throughout the state, the pardon and parole investigations. The interviews if you can imagine were massive amounts of interviews to put this case together from December 15, 1978. On March 15, 1979, we were ready to present cases. So we indicted six people in Tennessee for this conspiracy. We were never able to get enough evidence to indict Blanton in the case.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you find out who had signed Ray Blanton's name to the documents taken to Memphis?

MR. HILLIN: Yes. We found out that Ray Blanton had never signed any documents. He had given this power of attorney to a young man who was from Murfreesboro who was on his appointments staff. For the life of me and I have a picture of him that I put in the book, but I cannot recall his name at this point.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was not Ed Hood?

MR. HILLIN: No, not Ed Hood. Well, it will come to me. It is in the book. It was his appointment's secretary

who was given the power of attorney. It told this appointment secretary that any time that Eddie Sisk or anyone from the Legal Counsel's office brought a document in there, [he] was to sign. Can you imagine that kind of carte blanche?

DR. CRAWFORD: By that power of attorney it seems to me to have assumed certain responsiblity for a person, didn't it?

MR. HILLIN: Yes. But that person did and brought those documents in. Later on we found that in over 500 commutations that Governor Blanton had made, that all of those had been done by this appointments secretary. So after all this happened, Blanton re-signed in a signing ceremony all of the documents claiming to have given them careful consideration. He had his lawyers up there, Jim Neal and Aubrey Harwell and even the Secretary of State, Gentry Crowell, to attest that he was the governor. The way I understood it went, he would say, "Oh yes, I remember this one when it went through, and certainly a deserving case." He had to sign 500 documents.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, as anyone who has autographed a book, they know it takes a lot of time.

MR. HILLIN: (Laughter) It takes a lot of time. You are exactly right, Charles. We rocked on, but we were never able to bring the Governor into it.

DR. CRAWFORD: You did find marked money--marked by FBI on Eddie Sisk?

MR. HILLIN: Eddie Sisk had marked money. We found marked money on the man who was lieutenant of highway patrol.

We found marked money on the extradition officer, Charles Benson. We had all these taped conversations, but we didn't have the Governor in the conspiracy. So we instituted all these investigations and then we had allegations after that there was a massive conspiracy that had been going on in connection with the awarding of liquor licenses. But we had no proof of that. Nothing seemed to jell as far as the Governor was concerned.

DR. CRAWFORD: At what time did you get these allegations about liquor licenses?

MR. HILLIN: After the raid. We had allegations of everything that came through. We had allegations that you could buy GED Equivalency tests, you could buy a high school diploma,that road building contracts were rigged, and building contracts were rigged. Just anything almost that went through the Governor's office or the state was for sale. But allegations are different from proof. So getting into those things we started rocking along, but we never could tie Blanton into anything until up in 1979. I got a call from a source that, I guess, will never be identified. [This was a] person that I gave the codename "Poet", who called me and asked me to come to his office, that he had information of extreme value. I had known this person and had respected this person for years. I went to this person's office, which was very cluttered. He had a very methodical mind; a very intelligent person and there this person told the story that Ray Blanton had been involved with a man by the name of Jack Ham. Ham had bought a liquor license and from him and paid him off by paying off a note of about $28,000 at the Commerce Union Bank.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was the note in Ray Blanton's name that was paid off?

MR. HILLIN: Yes, the note was there. It was a payoff and in return that Ham would be given a liquor license and would be protected in his franchise with the liquor license. When I pressed the "Poet" for details, he says, "You can round this out, but you have now the information that you need." It turned out as I was working with Internal Revenue. I had to wait to protect the source. To protect the source I had to wait awhile and I passed it on routinely to the Internal Revenue Service who grabbed it and right away they incorporated that into their investigation. It was pay dirt! After that it was just like pulling out the straw or the thread that brings the whole thing. It unraveled after that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Those things are matters of record--the debt and the payment of it.

MR. HILLIN: It was there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Until that time you had a great deal that had been done in cash. And this was difficult to deal with. Hank, what do think about these widespread allegations of so many things in state government being sold. It seems to me that in many gubernatorial administrations with some exceptions in the past--recent twentieth century at any rate--there had been a certain amount of political manipulation in pardons, paroles and probably, I think from what I know, in highway building contracts. But this seems to have been on an unusual scale that so much across the board was being sold. It is almost as if the state

government were a super market and everything for sale.

Do you have any idea yourself of how widespread these things were? I know you proved some.

MR. HILLIN: I do have some idea. They were much more widespread than we were able to prove because getting admissable prosecutive evidence is much more difficult. You can know something happened many times that you can't prove. It was widespread. I likened it in the book TENNPAR to the Blantons running the state almost as if it were their plantation. Whatever services and goods that came off the plantation were not a public trust, but it was theirs. They had won it. They brought the spoils system that had been credited to our 7th president, Andrew Jackson, but it went back to Roman days. They brought the spoils system to a high degree of proficiency.

It was not like they were holding things in trust for us, that they were stealing everything and taking everything from the public for their own good. They lived high. The thing that amazed me in the whole process when we finally caught them and brought them to justice. They never seemed to have any remorse about it. In talking with them and Sisk and all them, they were furious at us. Their constant thing that we heard was, "We didn't do anything that others hadn't done before. Why pick on us?"

To me I can't believe that things like this went on that wide spread. Maybe there have always been poltical favors done for others. But it is hard for me to believe that anything of this magnitude went on.

DR. CRAWFORD: As a Tennessee historian, Hank, I don't think it

had. There are specific things that I have run across. Again, this is the difference in what you know and what is provable, in previous administrations but not all, some of them were honest from top to bottom. But in some of them people were gotten out of prison for special reasons and as favors to special people. I think the highway building business has always been closely identified with government and had raised money and paid off political office holders and in consequence had been allowed to sort of divide up the public expenditure for transportation which is a big one among the major businesses taking part. There are a few things like that, but I don't believe in Tennessee history in recent times--time that people can remember--that it had been this widespread. That so much had been for sale and it had spread out from apparently the center of government.

MR. HILLIN: Our investigations substantiated what you said there. We found in the road building that there had been a long standing practice of road contractors and builders that kicked back to get the contracts. Then this had almost been a way of life. Gene Blanton described it as a way of life. He said he had grown up in that way of life. He had done it when he was a boy with his daddy. I think that was right.

The other thing that was really significent about this case but the actual throwing out of Blanton of office. The first governor ever to be convicted. After he was indicted for whisky licenses, that came after January of 1979. Three days before his term was actually officially expired, the FBI received word from a confidential source in his office that Blanton was planning to

make other releases--massive releases of rapists and robbers--one of which was Eddie Denton, a convicted triple killer from Newport, Tennessee. By this time Lamar Alexander had been elected Governor and was waiting in the wings to be inaugurated as Governor.

In spite of all that, Lamar Alexander was resisting being inaugurated early. Even with this new information that he is going to do this thing--he's going to release these people that are involved in the FBI's case--you've got to assume the governorship. He said, "I'll only do it if the speakers concur of the two houses." For one day there Tennessee was in a state of crisis waiting for somebody to make a decision.

DR. CRAWFORD: You could not go to the incumbent governor who was the problem. The governor-elect did not want to make the decision--at least alone. And how did you handle that?

MR. HILLIN: It was a terrible time. You see if Blanton had heard this, he could have taken certain steps that would have almost insured that he would have not lost the trappings of power. If he had wanted to, he could have mobilized the National Guard or brought out a troop of National Guardsmen and ringed the Capitol if he wanted to. It was his National Guard.

DR. CRAWFORD: He did have that power.

MR. HILLIN: He could have done many things had he known what we were doing. But all day long Lamar Alexander waited for somebody to take the leadership. He called Howard Baker. Howard Baker told him not to do it--that it was a bad

precedent. He said, "I am not going to do it until I talk to Fred Thompson." Fred Thompson came back from Washington. I was up there that morning delivering subpoenas. Finally, the hero of that negotiation was Bill Leach.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did that happen?

MR. HILLIN: I was not with them when they were doing all this. Bill Leach was coordinating with the two speakers of Houses and with the U.S. Attorney. Finally, Leach said, "Someone has got to act." So he said, "Governor, you have got to take the leadership. You've got to do this thing." Leach actually got the Speakers then to agree to certain things and he got Alexander to agree and finally, late in the afternoon they agreed and Lamar Alexander was inaugurated.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who swore him in? I was not there.

MR. HILLIN: Henry of Pulaski. Chief Justice Henry of Pulaski swore him in. After he was sworn in, he sealed the Capitol and stopped all the commutations that Blanton was working on. That officially ended the era of Ray Blanton.

DR. CRAWFORD: Three days early.

MR. HILLIN: Three days early. The first governor who would later be convicted of violations of selling liquor licenses and the first governor ever to be convicted and the first governor to be forced from office early in Tennessee.

DR. CRAWFORD: It was a first in Tennessee.

MR. HILLIN: It was. As I sit here and talk about it, it was a time like I had never thought would happen in Tennessee. It was an exciting time for me, but it was a sad time.

Loving this state and. . .

DR. CRAWFORD: It would have been more sad for you, would it not, if nothing had been done and things had gone the way that they seemed to be going.

MR. HILLIN: It really had to be done. One of the things that history has not recorded is--and I would like to put this on the record--what would have happened if we had not had the investigations of Blanton as ongoing. He had the Legislature to give him the power to run for a second term during his term of office.

DR. CRAWFORD: A second consecutive term for four years. That could be done.

MR. HILLIN: Right. He could have done it had he run again, we would have had another four years of Blanton. Perhaps, or had not we had the scandals involving his administration Jake Butcher, the banker from East Tennessee might have been elected and he was dying to get his hands on state funds to comingle those with his bank. If that had been allowed to happen, there wouldn't have been enough FBI agents to ever had unsorted or sorted out the problems.

DR. CRAWFORD: That's interesting because Tennessee history went one way down one road with the governor and with the would-be governor, Jake Butcher, going to prison, but it might have gone a different way. I think we ought to discuss this some Hank. Could we do that?

THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THE PROJECT IS "RECENT TENNESSEE POLITICAL HISTORY." THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MR. HENDERSON HILLIN. THE DATE IS FEBRUARY 4, 1989. THE PLACE IS NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE. TRANSCRIBED BY BETTY WILLIAMS. INTERVIEW III.

DR. CRAWFORD: Hank, we know how things developed with the indictment you secured and the conviction of Governor Blanton. Apparently, it was a very close thing and for a while it might have gone either way. What do you think the situation would have been had the investigation not been successful?

MR. HILLIN: Number one, I think there is a very good likelihood that Jake Butcher, the East Tennessee banker, would have been elected. Tennessee is traditionally a Democratic state. I think there is a very good likelihood that Butcher would have been elected. Probably had he co-mingled all the funds of the state with his banks that were under investigation there is no telling where this would have led. I think there was a potential there at one time had he been elected, and had this investigation not been conducted, that he could have destroyed the banking industry in Tennessee. It came close to, I think, it was one of the top three financial failures of this century.

DR. CRAWFORD: There was a parallel in Tennesse earlier in the Luke Lea/Rogers Caldwell banking empire and its

collapse in, I believe, November of 1932, taking a great deal of the state's money down with it. It forced the state into bankruptcy and resulting in trials and imprisonment of some people involved and the near impeachment of Governor Henry Horton. Yes, the relationship between money and banking empires has been strong in the state.

Of course, there is a question of whether Ray Blanton would have been elected for a second consecutive term, or whether Jake Butcher might have had the Democratic nomination, or it might have been another Blanton term and then a Butcher administration.

MR. HILLIN: I don't know. I guess we will never know and I'm glad that Tennessee was spared.

DR. CRAWFORD: What about your relations through all this with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation? I know they were helpful to you. At the same time since they were a state agency, it must have been sort of risky having other people know what was going on.

MR. HILLIN: Well, during the investigation, it was then known as the Tennessee Bureau of Criminal Identification. It became completely politicized during the Blanton era. The Director was appointed by the Governor and served at the Governor's pleasure. It was at that point, a part of and it was coming out of the Department of Safety at that point. Since then, as far as any cooperation in this case, the agents were totally afraid to cooperate with us. Even the agent who gave us the information that led us to raid the Capitol the first time requested that his name be kept in confidence.

They were totally politicized, of little or no help, and they knew it. The agents have told me that they held meetings during this time away from the office to talk about the situation and what could be done. They felt totally worthless and drained.

Now, the situation is much better. They are a free standing organization and have their own director. It is much more independent of the Governor's office and the Legislature. Although it does have some political connections, but that was another plus that came out of the TENNPAR investigation which was the freeing of the state agency from so much political control.

We got no help at all. In fact, they covered up a lot of stuff. That was another benefit.

DR. CRAWFORD: When you received the call from that person in what is now the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation warning about the destruction of files, how long after receiving the call was it until you were able to seize the records there?

MR. HILLIN: The next afternoon. It took that long to get the subpoenas completed and typed up and the search parties and the seizure parties lined up. We had firearms lined up the next day and that was a plus because I had an adequate manpower pool to draw from. We actually turned and set up everything to work the next day at one or two o'clock. So it worked out beautifully.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever have any idea of what records might have been purged or destroyed before you got there?

MR. HILLIN: No, they were really not doing that. There was a process that they had to go through. At certain

times they could change certain records or clean out certain records. That was really more of a routine thing. That was erroneous information, but it worked out well for our purposes.

DR. CRAWFORD: It certainly required some fast movement, maybe moving the timetable up.

MR. HILLIN: In fact, it was one of those breaks you get in a case.

DR. CRAWFORD: Also, there is the fact that altering records or just simply going through records to destroy selectively is a lot of work. Anyone who works with paper and files would know it would take time.

MR. HILLIN: Oh yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Hank, how was the role of the press a factor in all this? I know it had changed a great deal from the pre-Watergate time.

MR. HILLIN: I was a little bit amazed that the press was really not more vigorous in pursuing Blanton than they were. It seemed to me that Larry Brinton did some stories early on, but it seemed to me that this was such a fertile ground had they really had some real qualified investigative reporters that they could have found out some of the things. There were many things they could not have found out. We were having difficulty finding things out even with a subpoena power and a federal grand jury.

I would say generally they could not have known of the secret nature of the investigation and many of these things. On reflection I think today, this would have been a fertile field

for a person to have worked full time in.

DR. CRAWFORD: They had long been in the habit of passing up a great deal that was irregular in politics. At least, a lot of it had been passed up. Watergate perhaps had changed their approach to it. They were willing to get into more things, but I could see your point. If it was hard for the FBI with its resources to develop, I can see how reporters might have had trouble finding out.

MR. HILLIN: I don't believe they could ever have broken the case as we did. And it would have been difficult. I would have to give them pretty fair marks for reporting what they did.

DR. CRAWFORD: You feel that the reporting was generally fair and accurate so far as they knew, if anyone researching this in the files could count on the newspaper Tennessean or the Banner accounts reflecting the facts as they knew them.

MR. HILLIN: As far as they knew them. Of course, most of the facts that they were getting were denials from the Blanton administration that anything irregular was going on.

DR. CRAWFORD: Of course, that is part of the story. The fact that the questions are asked even if your political leader denies it. How did that change as the indictments were returned and the case did develop? Did they report pretty thoroughly?

MR. HILLIN: Oh yes. As the case became the number one news story in Tennessee--voted the number one news story

in Tennessee for 1978--then again I think it was the number one or number two news story in 1979. So for two successive years it ranked high among the news stories and among the media in Tennessee. They gave it worldwide coverage after it became public.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have any difficulty coordinating different parts of the investigation in East, and West and Middle Tennessee?

MR. HILLIN: Yes, that is always a problem when you have distance and time involved. But it helped because Memphis was in the same field division as I was in and that helped. It also helped that Chattanooga was headed by a close personal friend of mine, Irv Wells,and we had this close personal relationship. I could pick up the phone and talk to him like a brother and he could do the same thing with me. In any kind of endeavor whether it's academic or investigative or whatever, if you have networking, it works.

DR. CRAWFORD: Personal relationships mean a great deal whether something is cooperative or whether it is merely formal.

MR. HILLIN: Right, this makes the difference. Of course, in the FBI knowing the agents as well as I did that took a lot of the sting away.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you have any idea how much money was paid into the hands of people of government during this time?

MR. HILLIN: I have been asked that question over and over. I really don't. It would just be the wildest

speculation if I did. I do know including the bid rigging that there were millions of dollars that were involved. How much of it was actually paid or was awarded I don't know. But I do know that the bid-rigging involved millions of dollars, the pardon and parole cases were not on that par. They sold anywhere between $1500 to $25,000, up to and including the one that we initiated for $100,000, but that didn't go through. We know that there were thousands of dollars involved, but we have never been able to pin it all down because there were so many cases we were not able to break.

DR. CRAWFORD: An interesting thing about crime is that people are concerned about such things as pardons and paroles of criminals which might involve small amounts of money and be less concerned about the theft of money itself or the diversion of it as in the case of bid-rigging where you had great amounts money expended and one would assume great amounts paid out.

MR. HILLIN: I think it is just the nature of what it is involved in. The idea of taking money to let murderers get out of prison is just a thing that people can't accept.

DR. CRAWFORD: They would find it frightful and abhorrent that the whole justice system was being perverted and that people who should be in jail according to it were being turned out.

MR. HILLIN: Yes, that's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think they would be much more concerned about that than bid-rigging or about liquor license or

equipment sales. Did you ever develop any more about the state equipment sales?

MR. HILLIN: No, actually one person was convicted. That was, I think, his name was McCarter. I think he plead guilty to a case. The state brought several cases, but nothing ever really happened with it. It was just one of those things that there was a general tenor of corruption, but there again it showed the ineffectiveness of a state agency trying to investigate their own superiors. They were shut off.

DR. CRAWFORD: The problem in that would be obvious, I suppose. I think it would be virtually impossible in Tennessee. Everything is tied very closely together. What was Marie Ragghianti's role after her first submission of information? I know a book was written about this and called Marie, A True Story. Was her role important after the submission of the first information up until you seized the files?

MR. HILLIN: No, Marie's role diminished from the day she gave us her suspicions. She never played a significant role. I would ask her to wear a tape recorder, to work undercover. She was in a position where if she had really elected to become an FBI informant [as] she had a close personal relationship with Sisk. She was in with all of them. She could have, as the term goes, worked herself into the confidence of all of them, taped them all and really become a "star" witness. But she elected that she could not do that. Her thing was to provide the suspicions. But after it was all over, four years later the book, Marie, A True Story, depicts her as sort of being involved on the periphery

of the investigation and calling. She did stay in touch, but there was not the closeness. She just was not involved. She was not a major figure after she gave us that initial information.

DR. CRAWFORD: It would have been a key position. I could see how you might have had direct statements from the people who were involved and very good information. Do you know why she did not help more? Was it fear?

MR. HILLIN: I think it was what we talked about. I think she had a little gratitude for having given her a job when she needed it. I think it was a personal friendship with Eddie Sisk. I think that had something to do with it. I think she didn't really like the role of being an [informant]. When you are an undercover informant, you are really a spy in another camp. I don't think she liked that. She liked the cameras and the spotlight not the hard undercover work--hard nitty-gritty work.

DR. CRAWFORD: Certainly publicity is something an undercover agent would not be getting. Goodness! (Laughter)

MR. HILLIN: The more you get, the less effective you are.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes. The appearance in that book, her role would appear to be more important than probably it really was. Of course, I am familiar with the author of the book, whom I believe is noted more for writing novels than anything else.

MR. HILLIN: Peter Maas.

DR. CRAWFORD: But a movie was made and I assume a good deal of money was made.

MR. HILLIN: Oh, yes, Marie and Peter split, I think, $700,000

for the movie rights to that book. It is kind of interesting sidelight. Peter Maas came to see me about that book. We lived in Brentwood at the time. I told him what he was about to do was wrong. That she was not the heroine of the story. The true heroine of the story was Sheryl Leverett who actually wore a tape recorder into the Capitol and tape recorded state officials and transmitted money to them and participated in the investigation and actually brought them down. When we had asked Marie to work like that, she wouldn't do that. He said that he knew a good story. She'd risen to the top position that a woman had and that she would appeal to woman's lib and to the woman's movement and she had been a battered wife. " I know a good story and I am going to write it."

DR. CRAWFORD: So he was not interested in the truthful situation, but in a good story, not to mention $700,000 plus anything if the book sold.

MR. HILLIN: Right. There was nothing going to deter him from writing the book.

DR. CRAWFORD: So in financial terms his judgment was right of course about that.

MR. HILLIN: Right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Sheryl Leverett probably would have been hard to publicize as a noble character.

MR. HILLIN: Right.

DR. CRAWFORD: But she did actually attempt to wear the microphone?

MR. HILLIN: Oh yes. I taped numerous conversations. She risked

her life going in there. She was searched one time while she was in the Capitol.

DR. CRAWFORD: And they didn't find it?

MR. HILLIN: They didn't find it. They came very close, but didn't find it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Then, she underwent danger in doing it.

MR. HILLIN: Oh yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have any backup for her in case she was caught?

MR. HILLIN: No, the day she was searched we had agents around, but we didn't know what was going on in the Capitol at that time because we had learned that the Governor's Office had sophisticated detection equipment available to them and I didn't put a transmitter on her.

DR. CRAWFORD: You were recording but not broadcasting?

MR. HILLIN: Yes, recording but not broadcasting. I was a little uptight too.

DR. CRAWFORD: She would be something of a heroine undergoing that.

MR. HILLIN: Oh yes. Sheryl Leverett was the true heroine of the story.

DR. CRAWFORD: But did not get publicized?

MR. HILLIN: Well, she did in my book. I gave her-- in TENNPAR she received due credit and history will duly note her role in protecting Tennessee.

DR. CRAWFORD: She certainly will in this manuscript. Is she still in Nashville? Is her husband out of prison

at this point?

MR. HILLIN: Her husband got out of prison a few months later. She is doing well. She's had a child almost every year since then. They live on a farm up in Robertson County and are doing real well.

DR. CRAWFORD: Some things do turn out well.

MR. HILLIN: Yes. She is doing well.

DR. CRAWFORD: And Marie, I believe, went to Florida or something like that.

MR. HILLIN: I think so. I've lost touch with Marie.

DR. CRAWFORD: And I think Peter Maas was from the Northeast some where.

MR. HILLIN: Right. This has been an exciting project for me, Charles, and I have appreciated your coming and interviewing me. It has been an exciting thing getting to know you and to share your knowledge of Tennessee history and to be with you.

DR. CRAWFORD: We have had enjoyable trips through Tennessee history, Hank. Thank you very much.

MR. HILLIN: We certainly have.